

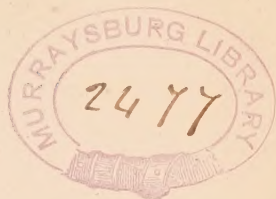


No. 2861

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CATCHING A TARTAR.

A Novel.



BY

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AUTHOR OF 'FROZEN HEARTS.'

'Sperate Miseri. Cavete Felices.'

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



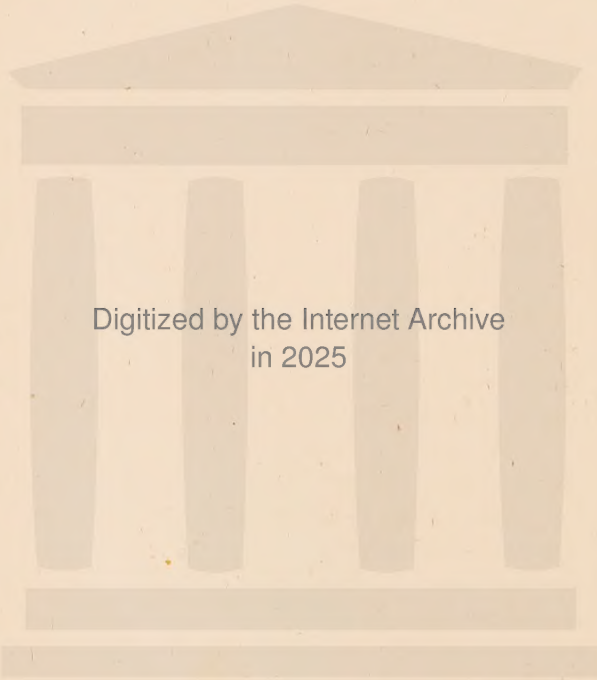
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CATCHING A TARTAR.

CHAPTER I.

OSSA ON PELION.

IN this utter discomfiture, Martha found a speedy solvent for all her egotisms and self-complacencies. Suddenly, in its full meridian, her star had been ignominiously snuffed out.

Mistaking herself for an eagle, she had taken a goose-flight, and actually splashed, like that heavy-witted bird, into a goose's mud-puddle. Soon her reflections deepened into downright disgust. To think that she, the soul of cleverness, had husbanded those wonderful energies of hers for four long years, only to see them dissipated at last in a cloud of very mal-odorous smoke! To think that what was intended for an impressive drama, should end, after all, in a feeble rehearsal of

‘Much Ado about Nothing!’ And as if this were not bad enough, in all conscience, there remained the galling admission to be made to Mr. Palmer, that *his* had been the superior wisdom; the very thought of which made her grind her teeth. If she, so little versed in the confession of faults, could but escape that grim necessity!

The necessity confronted her, however, like a ten-barred gate, over which it was in vain for her to attempt to leap. So she began, as is usual in such cases, the hunt for loopholes, and found one in the amazing discovery that as a child she had probably been in the habit of viewing everything through a false and delusive medium. Doubtless, it was true that all young people were in the habit of surveying possibilities through too broad a lens, and in spinning serious projects out of that flimsiest and most unsubstantial of materials—hope.

Such a reflection, it may be inferred, had never occurred to her before; and even now, it is greatly to be feared, the conviction was weakened by a remnant of the old ineradicable self-sufficiency which had made all her misfortunes possible, and caused her, in these moments of extreme discomfiture, to smart

under the anticipation of Mr. Palmer's moral lecture. This is exactly what she thought: 'My contrition and self-abasement are sufficient in themselves, without serving as pegs for any of *his* sentimental tags and tatters and "I told you so's." I cannot and will not endure such a humiliation.' It is certainly true that the most perfect system of ethics ever devised would, if applied, but act as a counter-irritant to wounded vanity and self-convicted imbecility. To perceive a dunce's cap peeping out from among boasted convictions, is quite exasperating enough in all conscience; one does not wish to see the moralist's finger pointing it out to a world curious in such matters. Moreover, let us confess that it is a great consolation in such cases to know that lofty beacons of experience are *not* raised above every pitfall, and that exemplars do not voluntarily dwell upon Stylites' columns. There is often much blind groping after Will o' the Wisp upon the part of people vastly wise in their generation; and is it not plainly upon record that adults are occasionally wounded by spring-guns of their own setting? and that grey-haired conspirators are sometimes literally hoisted by their own petards?

Martha's philosophical reflections were

shortly interrupted by a common-place incident, viz., the entrance of 'Tilda, who, strange to say, brought sherry and biscuits by her mistress's command. Though clearly in a state of very great trepidation, she found time, before leaving the room, to seize Martha by the hand and whisper :

‘Thank you, mim, and God bless you ; I know you’re a lady and mean honest.’

Which, somehow, caused Martha to brighten up a little ; and, once more alone, she drank a glass of wine, which straightway diffused a genial glow through her shivering body, and awakened to new life whatever was lethargic among her faculties. First of all, she was recalled to a sense of the obvious shortcomings of her toilette, and stepping to the glass, she brushed back her tumbled hair, removed the blood-stains from her face, and otherwise repaired the damages received in the recent encounter. She did not belong to that uncomfortable class of women who have hysterics at their beck and call, who swallow nauseous drugs for sham colics, conjure up dreadful hacking coughs, and squeeze needle-pricks into imparting sanguinary stains to point lace and cambric ; else she would have inevitably arranged her tatters and her back hair with a

view to a certain melo-dramatic effect upon Mr. Palmer.

It may be that messieurs the artists are right, and that injured innocence appears to better advantage without hair-pins and in *negligé*; but there are those of the opinion that coquetry under difficulties, when disillusion and heart-aches, carking cares and sorrows, unsweetened by a single glimmer of hope, bear hard and heavy upon a woman's endurance, is a species of heroism worthy of all praise. That a comely widow should find her affliction mitigated by a knowledge that mourning is becoming to her complexion, would seem, to a very fallow lady, perhaps, a monstrous and unpardonable thing.

'Knowing what human nature is,' say the social philosophers, 'we would as soon think of rebuking the flowers for opening their drenched and broken petals after a storm.'

The cynics are not so reasonable. They only shrug their shoulders and exclaim :

'The end is always the same; egotism is the sap and savour of grief as well as of joy. Vanity is king of kings and lord of great and little souls.'

Three-quarters of an hour passed, and Martha's mind became filled with dark mis-

givings as to the result of the coming interview. Of Mr. Palmer's sagacity there now could not be a shadow of doubt. He had warned her against fatuous appearances and precipitate action, and clearly disapproved the scheme, which *ab ovo* had been to meet cunning by cunning, to undermine, surprise, entrap, and finally overwhelm—amid red fire, *feux-de-joie*, and affecting tableaux—a woman who, but for his interposition, would now, in all probability, consign her to the police-station. What would he, what *could* he say of such a miserable *fiasco* as this? Would he not wash his hands in despair of the whole wretched business? She was afraid so—she could scarcely hope for anything else; and when a loud knock came at last at the front-door, her heart leaped to her throat, and she arose in great confusion to await his coming. Her suspense was of short duration. There was audible a moment a sound as of a whispered consultation in the hall. Then the door opened, and Mr. Palmer, closely followed by Mrs. Warren, entered the room. He seemed greatly agitated and distressed as he stepped up to Martha and extended his hand.

‘I am surprised and grieved, Miss Sum-

merfield,' he said, 'to meet you under such circumstances as these.'

'Yes,' she answered, in a low tone, while her eye-lids drooped before his steady look, 'I know that I have placed myself in a very false position, and have put you to much trouble and annoyance, for which I am truly sorry.'

'There is no question of trouble in the matter,' he rejoined, seating himself in obedience to a gesture from Mrs. Warren, 'and it is not the first time by any means, that the vagaries of a client have robbed me of an after-dinner nap. My chief concern is for you, and for the interests you have placed in needless jeopardy by your inconsiderate action this evening.'

'Excuse me for interrupting you,' said Mrs. Warren, abruptly facing round to the solicitor, 'but may I ask whether this lady's interests are of sufficient importance to justify her extraordinary conduct? Your representation as to her social position and the purity of her intentions are satisfactory in a degree, of course; but surely I am entitled to an explanation of the motives which led her to dispense with the civilities usually observed in entering a stranger's house for the first time?'

‘Without any question you are,’ rejoined Mr. Palmer, ‘and it is my purpose to make such an explanation at once. Before doing so, however, I should be glad, madam, if you would answer one or two of *my* questions—they are important ones, I assure you.’

A look of genuine astonishment appeared in Mrs. Warren’s face, quickly followed by a sneer.

‘I am not in the habit of being catechised by strangers in my own house,’ she answered, ‘but if your queries are in anywise pertinent to the subject, and are such as in the use of my discretion I can safely answer, I shall certainly do so. Let us hear them at once.’

‘In the first place, then,’ said he, assuming an air of grave deliberation, ‘I labour under no mistake, of course, as to the name?’

‘Name! what name? whose name?’ and she flashed a look at him that made him wince.

‘Excuse me, madam, I was alluding to yourself—I——’

‘I should be sorry to believe you guilty of wilful impertinence, Mr. Palmer,’ she interrupted, with a quickened respiration, ‘but does it not occur to you that this inquiry savours strongly of it? You are perfectly well

aware that my name is Mrs. Warren. Have done with irrelevancies, if you please.'

'I—I intended no discourtesy, madam, I assure you,' said Mr. Palmer, whose equanimity was for a moment disturbed by this incident. 'Never having had the pleasure of meeting you before, I simply wished to place your identity beyond a doubt—that was all.'

'My identity!' she repeated. 'I do not understand. I was under the impression that we had now to do with the identity of this young person,' indicating Martha with a gesture. 'It pleases you, it would seem, to be mysterious, Mr. Palmer. Plainly, now, what do you mean?'

'Simply this, madam, are you or are you not the Mrs. Warren who resided for a time in Perth Amboy during the summer of 1861?'

This was clearly unexpected, and before answering, she turned with heightened colour and gave Martha a quick, sharp look of suspicion.

'I am; certainly I am,' she said; 'and is this lady a relative of Mr. Summerfield, of Perth Amboy? She appears to be known by the same name.'

What Martha conceived to be the audacity of the woman fairly took her breath away.

‘Why, I am his daughter!’ she exclaimed, starting forward in her chair, her eyes flashing and her pale face kindled into an indignant flame.

The answer had a curious effect upon Mrs. Warren. She looked Martha over from head to foot with undisguised contempt.

‘Oh,’ she said, ‘oh, indeed! If this, then, is so, pray to what am I indebted for the honour of your visit? The mystery is more inexplicable than ever;’ and she turned with a glance of inquiry to Mr. Palmer again.

This was contrary to expectation. According to all the rules of poetic justice, she should have been stunned by this discovery.

Mr. Palmer was so impressed with the unlooked-for aspect of the case, that he interrupted Martha with a gesture as she was about to speak, and said, in a more subdued and respectful tone than before:

‘As she has already told you, Mrs. Warren, she came here with the expectation of seeing her father.’

Again the look of contempt in Mrs. Warren’s face; again the sneer as she retorted:

‘ Her father !. Then *you* corroborate this pretty tale of hers, it would appear ?’

Mr. Palmer and Martha exchanged glances; perceiving which, Mrs. Warren went on :

‘ If so, you will be good enough to explain *why* she expected to find Mr. Summerfield here ? Do not approach your subject by circuitous paths, Mr. Palmer. Quickly and plainly, what do you mean ?’

By this time a dangerous light began to gleam in her eyes.

Mr. Palmer was both perplexed and gratified. His conviction as to Mrs. Warren’s moral guilt had been considerably modified since his interview with Martha on the previous Wednesday. That she was, in some wise, accessory to Mr. Summerfield’s disappearance, he had not a shadow of doubt ; but he could not clearly determine the degree of her guilt, and, in her present attitude, it puzzled him to decide where sincerity ended and simulation began.

He reflected a moment, and then he answered :

‘ You were intimately acquainted with Mr. Summerfield, were you not ?’

A strange smile glimmered an instant upon her face ; her lips moved, and some

half-shaped words quivered upon them and quickly died out. Then, in a hard metallic voice, she said :

‘ Many years since. Yes, it is quite true.’

‘ And your visit to Perth Amboy, perhaps, was prompted by a desire to——’

‘ Stop !’ Mrs. Warren said peremptorily. ‘ You are exceeding the bounds of ordinary civility ; and I hope you will be able to justify yourself for so doing. The nature of my former relations with Mr. Summerfield I am disinclined, for many reasons, to disclose at this time. Those relations, however, were strictly honourable ; and I wish to distinctly impress upon your mind, Mr. Palmer, that my rencontre with him at Perth Amboy was wholly the result of accident. In the spring of that year I placed my brother, who is suffering from an incurable mental disorder, in the care of a distinguished New York physician. Pending the result of his treatment, I engaged rooms at an hotel in Perth Amboy, and there met, for the first time in many years, the gentleman who it appears has been traced to this house. Our intercourse was of short duration. I have never seen him since. Now you may proceed.’

Martha, becoming nervous in spite of a

strenuous effort at self-control, looked at Mr. Palmer, and awaited his answer with manifest anxiety. He, on his part, began to be troubled with an uneasy sense that Mrs. Warren might in the end bring dire confusion upon her interlocutor. After a moment's consideration, he looked up, with a feeble smile, and said :

‘It would be an affectation in you, Mrs. Warren, to deny that you were upon intimate terms with Mr. Summerfield during the greater part of your sojourn in Perth Amboy?’

‘If you mean by that the acceptance of occasional civilities at his hands, I certainly have no wish to deny the fact. There were many reasons, and insurmountable ones at that, why the intimacy could not assume any other character. Am I sufficiently explicit, Mr. Palmer? or,’ she added, with concentrated scorn in the tone of her voice, ‘do you carry professional caution so far as to require a written testimonial from the rector of the parish in all cases where the question of a woman’s reputation is concerned?’

‘This is not a question of your reputation, Mrs. Warren,’ said the lawyer blandly, ‘only in so far as it relates to the disappearance of Mr. Summerfield from his home.’

‘When and why did he leave his home, and what have I to do with it?’

‘You should know, madame; and we have come to you to obtain precisely that information.’

He paused a moment as he caught the expression of her uplifted and flashing eyes, and then he added, ‘Since you quitted Perth Amboy together, we clearly have the right, Mrs. Warren, to ask for light upon what, to us, is a very dark and mysterious business.’

‘Mr. Palmer,’ she answered quickly, ‘you are beginning to alarm me with your innuendoes. Are you destitute of all penetration, not to see that your words are so many riddles to me? Why don’t you speak clearly and to the point? Mr. Summerfield—you say, has left his home?’

‘He has.’

‘And his——’ she paused, and once more looked at Martha—‘and the French lady, this young person’s mother—does she still reside in Perth Amboy?’

‘You know she is dead, you wicked—*wicked* woman, and you know that you killed her! How *can* you sit there and talk in that way about a woman you have so cruelly

wronged ?' said Martha, now white to the lips with passion.

Mrs. Warren's lips also blanched, and a terrible retort framed itself upon them ; but, in its place came a caustic smile as she turned to Mr. Palmer again and said :

' I addressed my question to you, Mr. Palmer.'

' Oh—ah ! yes,' said Mr. Palmer, truly embarrassed at last, ' Miss Summerfield spoke the truth in regard to the death of her mother.'

' I can't stand this any longer !' exclaimed Martha, leaping to her feet and pacing the floor in great excitement, her eyes two vivid sparks, and her cheeks glowing with rage. ' I will not permit my mother's memory to be insulted and trampled upon by this woman, nor will I longer endure her insolence to myself ! My wrongs have been bitter and long enduring, and if you cannot defend me, Mr. Palmer, from the sneers of this woman who has been the cause of them all, let me go at once and seek a protector elsewhere !'

Many carefully-laid plans, and many loves, hopes and joys, go down into irretrievable ruin in this world, before the sweep and momentum of passionate and hasty denuncia-

tion. Mr. Palmer, however, was a social philosopher in his way, and rarely looked beneath the surface of an angry woman's utterances. So he merely elevated his eyebrows in the direction of Martha, shrugged his shoulders, smiled, and helped himself to a glass of wine from the decanter on the table.

In the meantime Mrs. Warren rose in a perfectly calm and deliberate manner, and approached the bell.

‘This interview had better be terminated at once, I think, Mr. Palmer,’ she said, in a tone of curt decision. ‘The interruptions and violence of your client make it utterly impossible for me to comprehend your meaning, beyond the fact of a mysterious disappearance and a death, for both of which, it would appear, I am held, in some wise, to be responsible. I know no more of Mr. Summerfield’s movements than you do—probably not so much. Your client is clearly out of her mind, and I trust, for your reputation as a man of sense, that you have not instigated her to commit this outrage upon the privacy of an utter stranger. On the day of my departure from Perth Amboy, Mr. Summerfield courteously placed his yacht at my disposal—

railway communication with New York did not then exist—and he personally accompanied me to my destination, where we parted upon such terms as was consistent with our relations, and had been habitual with us in all our limited intercourse during the summer. I have never seen or heard of him since. Nor, until this evening, had I any reason for believing that he had left America. All that I can possibly say upon the subject I have now said. A disgraceful farce has been played here this evening. It came very near being a tragedy. It is a difficult thing to overlook, but familiar as I am with some of the vagaries of a weak intellect, I consent to let the matter pass. We will now consider the interview as closed, Mr. Palmer, if you please;’ and she placed her hand upon the bell.

‘Stop!’ said Mr. Palmer—‘stop one moment I beg of you!’ He had risen, and now approached her. ‘I have much yet to say which cannot fail to interest you, and indeed, madam, its importance imperatively demands your attention.’

As she hesitated, with her hand still upon the bell, and glanced at Martha, who continued to pace the room in great excitement, he added :

‘Miss Summerfield, I trust, has by this time sufficiently reflected upon her hasty utterances, to know that I have not, at any time, ceased to be her true friend and well-wisher. If so, I beg her to calm herself, and once more resume her seat. As for Mrs. Warren, I beg to assure her that this is not an inquisition so far as she is concerned, and I am profoundly sorry if my inquiries hitherto have been of a nature to give her such an impression. I earnestly entreat you both to resume your seats;’ and he turned, with a bland smile, from one to the other, and motioned to their empty chairs.

‘The subject, to my mind, is exhausted,’ returned Mrs. Warren, ‘but not so with my patience. Let us hear what further you have to say;’ and she resumed her chair. Martha followed her example in dogged silence.

‘Well, madam,’ he resumed, ‘the truth of the matter is simply this: the day you left Amboy, Mr. Summerfield quitted it also. The yacht you speak of was found water-logged and empty in the bay. A reward of one hundred dollars was offered for the recovery of his body and—and—*your own*. I find you here alive and well. Mr. Summer-

field, however, has never been seen from that day to this by any of his friends.'

Mrs. Warren rose like a spectre out of her chair, and clutched the lawyer's arm, then sank with a blank stare and whitened lips back into her seat again.

'He is dead!' she gasped. Are you sure of it?'

'Well, that is the extraordinary part of it,' he answered, shrugging his shoulders. 'All the evidence we have in our possession would seem to indicate that he is still alive.'

Back came the hot blood into her face.

'Why do you trifle with me in this way, Mr. Palmer? my patience was freely given; do not impose upon it, sir, or it will be of short duration; you seek to mystify me, perhaps to frighten me.'

'What cause have you for fear?'

'I should ask you that question, and by what right you interrogate me thus. Do not forget, Mr. Palmer, as you go on that I am the mistress of this house, and you are, in a sense, the guest.'

Mr. Palmer changed colour, and inclined his head.

'You are quite right,' he said; 'if you wish it, I shall say no more.'

'I do not wish it; only do not talk and

act as if you suspected me of some heinous offence. You say that Mr. Summerfield is believed to be dead ?

‘ In Perth Amboy—yes.’

‘ And elsewhere ?’

‘ Well, yes—in some quarters, most certainly yes ; but——’ and Mr. Palmer hesitated a moment longer.

‘ But what ?’

‘ Well, you see, in examining Mr. Summerfield’s papers, his solicitor discovered that property to the extent of forty thousand pounds had been converted by him into a bill of exchange upon London, and that, a few weeks after his supposed death, this identical bill was paid in London to Mr. Charles Summerfield in person.’

Mrs. Warren’s face suddenly flamed red again.

‘ What persistent trifling then is this ?’ and she drew herself up to her fullest height once more. ‘ Is the man dead, or is he *not* ?’

Mr. Palmer, again shrugging his shoulders, felt that he was unable to give a categorical answer to that question, though it seemed tolerably clear, he was fain to admit, that Mr. Summerfield had, in any case, survived his misadventure upon the water.

‘Mr. Palmer!’ she exclaimed, with a quick, sharp look of suspicion, ‘I am a woman of the world. I have had to do with men of the law before now. You are keeping something back from me. You have a mine of some sort, or you imagine it to be so, at least, which you intend to spring at a favourable moment. Have done with disguises, and out with it, whatever it is. You were this young person’s legal adviser, and you did not egg her on to this wild-goose chase—Oh, pray don’t!’—as he made an expostulatory wave of his hand—‘pray don’t! Fools have no sex, though you wise men of Lincoln’s Inn imagine so. You did not egg her on to this wild-goose chase, I repeat, without a reason. Come, dispense with your slow-match—off with your explosive, and let us see what it is like.’

A beam of admiration sped from the lawyer’s eye.

‘Ahem! really,’ he began; ‘I really—er—must disclaim the charge, to begin with. I never egged a person on in my life. I—er—they, my clients at least, *some* clients, permit themselves to be egged on by their impulses, over which I can scarcely be expected to have any control. Hence difficulties, which I am called upon professionally to ex-

plain and smooth away. Now, my young friend here is pre-eminently a creature of impulse—of many impulses, in fact—and her zeal to-night has not only outstripped her judgment, but the instructions of her legal adviser. However, since you make a direct appeal to my frankness, madame, I will merely say that, in addition to the circumstantial evidence of the disaster upon the bay (in which you *presumably* played a part) and the conversion of the forty thousand pound draft into cash, there was the awkward proof of your presence in company with the missing man upon the *Leviathan*, your journey thence, always with the missing man, to Leamington, Venice, Rome——’

‘Stop!—for heaven’s sake, stop!’ cried Mrs. Warren at this juncture. Her lips curled, the glances from her indignant eyes seemed to pierce the good man through and through, so that he fairly cowered for a moment in his chair—‘stop! or I shall think that, as between your client and yourself, you are by far the greater lunatic. Do you, *can* you, suppose that I would dip my hands into money-bags not legally my own? From what you have seen of me to-night, do you think me capable of compounding an

insult, or of forgiving—however deep might be his remorse, or sincere his repentance—a man who wantonly struck down a beloved brother and entailed upon him the hideous curse of which, to-night you, young woman, with your bruises and scars, must bear unwilling witness? Mr. Palmer, the man who accompanied me upon the *Leviathan* was my *brother*—the man who was with me, the object of my tenderest solicitude and care, in Leamington, Venice, and Rome, was, poor fellow, this same helpless, suffering brother! And now, thanks to the existence of busybodies and fools and those who give a fool's advice to helpless imbecility, my very devotion is distorted into a crime, and every sisterly smile is construed into heaven knows what. For this I am dogged like a criminal over the map of Europe; my house is invaded, my brother's life placed in imminent peril, and I myself am called upon to endure with patience and equanimity the impudent and reckless behaviour of a woman who should still be in leading-strings and pinafores, and soundly whipped for her unmaidenly conduct to me this evening. What kind of an adviser must *you* be, Mr. Palmer, to countenance such folly, such utter tom-foolery as

this? Have you neither wife nor sister nor daughter of your own to guard from insult, that you can stand so tamely by and see a woman suffer such indignities as I have endured here in your presence? It lies in my power to bring confusion upon you both; and you, Mr. Palmer, as well as this silly creature, richly deserve that I should do so. But my indignation, great as it is, does not yet equal my forbearance. *I*, too, have my mysteries; you will learn of them all in good time, and probably with surprise. I shall put myself at once in communication with my solicitor; his name is Krinkle, and he is a neighbour of yours; you may receive a call from him in the morning. Now I think we have exhausted the subject for the present,' and she rose from her chair.

Mr. Palmer, who had been walking up and down the room, smarting under the unmerited castigation, with his hands thrust into his pockets, his teeth clenched, and the hot blood warming the very roots of his hair, suddenly faced round at the mention of Mr. Krinkle. Before he could speak, however, Martha rose white and trembling from her seat, but with no sign of humility in her manner, and spoke:

‘I have been guilty, I know, of an indiscretion, for which Mr. Palmer is in no wise responsible. I have been equally guilty of a great breach of courtesy, for which I have been severely, and I think sufficiently, punished ; but I feel that I must tell you before I go, if not in justification of my conduct, at least in explanation of it, that I learned of your residence in Camden Road from Lydia Parker. Wait, please hear me through,’ she added, as Mrs. Warren made a gesture of impatience and disgust ; ‘and it was she who informed me that my father accompanied you to Liverpool. Of your subsequent movements she professed to know but little, having quitted your service, she averred, upon her arrival in England. That is all I have to say.’

‘A miserable, deceitful creature, whom I packed off bag and baggage two years afterwards for dishonest practices !’ exclaimed Mrs. Warren, warmly. ‘And you believed her implicitly, as a matter of course ?’

‘To this extent I certainly did,’ said Martha, adjusting her bonnet-strings, ‘and though I clearly perceive my folly, I feel that I have much more than expiated it in submitting quietly to your sneers. Come, Mr. Palmer, I am now ready to go.’

There was something ludicrously pitiful in Mr. Palmer's manner, as he seized his hat and prepared for his departure.

'If you have said harsh things, madam,' he said, 'I have erred, I suspect, in the same direction. I was scarcely prepared for the completeness of your justification, and congratulate you upon it. I shall be happy to confer with Mr. Krinkle upon the subject to-morrow. Good-evening.'

A moment later, he and Martha were crossing the garden under the guidance of the butler. When she entered the cab, which had been waiting at the gate, she straightway burst into tears.

'How wicked it was in me not to follow your advice, Mr. Palmer,' she said, with difficulty choking down her sobs; 'and what a *dreadful* opinion you must have of me—it makes me quite miserable to think of it—and I am *so* sorry I have given you so much trouble.'

'There! there, child! never mind,' he answered, soothingly.

'But I *do* mind very much, indeed. You are too easy with me, you should scold me dreadfully. I expected nothing else—why don't you? You see, I was

always too much spoiled, and had too much my own way, and I am sure it will bring me into some frightful trouble yet before I die.'

'Nonsense, nonsense. Cheer up; we shall yet find a way out of your difficulties, never fear.'

'But it *does* look very dark just at present—confess that it does.'

'Well, yes; it is rather a complicated business, and I don't exactly like the tone in which that woman spoke of her mysteries; but then it may only resolve itself into a question of damages—a bill for broken glass, or something of that sort. At all events, Krinkle and I are on very good terms, and I shall hear all about it to-morrow. By the way, you had better come down to the office about eleven, and I will go with you to the bankers' and investigate that matter of the draft. We must certainly obtain a trace of your father in *that* quarter.'

At that moment, as they were descending the hill, a cab went toiling slowly up in which Martha could just discern the outlines of a man's face and figure.

Why she should give such a sudden start, and why her heart should beat so violently

she would have been at a loss to explain, for it was clearly next to impossible that Mr. Dexter should have occasion to visit Highgate—of all places in the world—at that hour of the night.

CHAPTER II.

A LEAP IN THE DARK.

WHEN Martha arrived in a woefully dejected and lachrymose condition at her lodgings in Bayswater, she found lying upon her sitting-room table a letter bearing the London post-mark and a superscription in an unfamiliar handwriting. Her first thought on picking it up was that it might be from Charley or Mr. Dexter, a conjecture disproved at once it would seem by the testimony of the post-mark. Then it occurred to her that it must be from the picture-dealer to whom in the morning she had submitted a number of her sketches for approval. Whereupon, feeling utterly indifferent to business, and all other considerations which did not bear directly upon her present difficulties, she threw down the missive with a gesture of impatience, turned out the gas, and buried herself in an easy-chair before the fire. The

latter had been recently kindled, and the room for a moment was in almost total darkness. Then a yellow flicker appeared upon the ceiling, and danced down the walls in a straggling intermittent fashion. The gaselier seemed to come and go for a time, and strange forms and faces pirouetted about the room in a manner that would have alarmed a nervous person unduly stimulated by conscience or orange Pekoe. Then the fire-irons asserted themselves by virtue of superior polish, and the flames, mounting higher, revealed Martha, sitting with bowed head and folded arms amidst a throng of shadowy forms. Upon the carpet stretched a grotesque monster, whose ears seemed to twitch with every pulsation of heat in the grate, while a faun, with arms akimbo, capered nimbly upon the opposite wall, in spite of the presence there of a dying man's face, from which the death-sweat was slowly oozing. Threads of fire, too, tangled in the facets of a Venetian mirror in the corner, glinted and shimmered in orange and green, while Psyche, chaste and white as a star-beam, peered timidly forth at last from behind the crimson curtains; and statues, pictures, bronzes grew palpable and distinct in the ascending flames.

It was in many respects a charming room, reflecting not only Martha's taste, but, it is to be feared, her extravagant habits as well. She was endowed, whether unfortunately or not, with eyes as acutely sensitive to deformity of every kind as the palate of a Brillat Savarin to corked Chambertin or the morning's *consommé*. If she could have had her way, she would have expurgated Wardour Street and Hanway Yard by consigning all the malformations of the Georgian era to a common *auto-da-fé*. Nor did she by any means pin her faith to the Quai Voltaire, the Via Condotti or Lung Arno. She had made far from despicable bargains in the Merceria, among the booths of the Piazza Navona, and in certain *vicoli* to be found within a stone's throw of the Mercato at Florence. Once she found a genuine water-colour by Blake in the purlieus of Newport Market, and a week afterwards picked up an authentic piece of Wedgwood for a shilling in the Westminster Road.

Briefly, she was an indefatigable *bric-à-brac* hunter, and by so much less a genuine artist, though always, as we have said, a keen sufferer from the sight of violent aberrations of form and colour, and having within her the

raw materials of a very good second-rate art critic. Her hunt for true *vieilleries* had ended with the cinerary urn of C. Calpurni. C. F. Ste. Vibiani, from Roma Vecchia, representing, in *mezzo-rilievo*, Pylades hurling Ægisthus from the throne ; a bust, in corallitico marble, and much chipped as to nose, of Domitia Longina, or some other imperial female ; a very questionable Cellini coffer, and an undoubted cabinet of the great Boule's.

‘ That is enough,’ she said ; ‘ I have paid my compliments to the antediluvians. Now for this wide-awake and very clever century of our own.’

So, instead of investing certain modest-looking but tangible drafts upon the coffers of Messrs. Coutts and Co. in apochtyphal Peruginos and murky Dosso Dossis, she pounced, one terribly rainy day, at the Hôtel Drouot, upon a Corot and a brace of Viberts, and got them, as such things go, amazingly cheap. They are visible now upon the walls of her sitting-room, in company with one of the drollest of Chevilliard's comic curés, and a side-splitting Kauffmann. There, too, blushing in the fervid glow of a piece of Wallsend, is the maid ‘with the *cruche cassée* upon her dainty arm, a *replica* from Martha's

own pencil. By her side is that wonderful angel boy who looks up, as if waiting for a tip, to the Foligno Madonna—a miracle of youthful beauty and grace. Beyond, is the head of Domenichino's St. Jerome; a sight to melt Pluto himself and all the nether gods. While, between this and a study from a 'Holy Family' by Andrea del Sarto, is Martha's own picture of 'La Liseuse,' which, in spite of its Tissot-like perfection of millinery, did *not* carry away a medal in the Salon of 1866. It is a pleasing souvenir, however, of a certain tepid form of artistic success, and not for a handful of golden sovereigns would she have parted with the souvenir itself, or the white paper label affixed to the frame and bearing the mysterious numerals, 3763.

For the rest, the room affords the clearest evidence of the presence there of an erratic and heterodox genius, who, worshipping many gods, doats on Capo-di-Monte, Saxe and Savona ware; confesses her idolatry to a *plateau* in Rose du Barry, daily says her paters before a bit of Sèvres painted by Damousse, and who, finding her faith veering round like a weathercock, now pointing to Limoge enamels, *cinq* *cento* tables, lac

cabinets and *chinoiseries*, now to *pagliesco* glass from Murano, jewelled murrhine cups from the *ateliers* of Salviati, *pâte-sur-pâte*, or Barbédienne bronzes, is faithful to all her manifold faiths, and only remains a capricious young lady with dilletante tastes, a certain aptitude for portraying the prettinesses of art, and eccentric notions as to the value of some of the world's recognised *chefs d'œuvre*. She was a profound admirer of Greutze, of David, of Watteau and Boucher. Albano's loves and graces, sporting through the 'Seasons,' she held to be adorable. She had a profound respect for Rubens, but she had a standing quarrel with the Flemish Aphrodite who so persistently elbows smaller and more dainty femininity out of Rubens's canvas. She could understand Paul Potter's Bull, but the Flemish Aphrodite was a mystery. Could it be that a sense of loyalty to the buxom genius of the Luxembourg and Fontainebleau prevented Rubens from elevating his standard of female loveliness beyond the level of his royal mistress's too—too—fleshy charms? A pregnant question, perhaps! Martha took a loftier critical flight than this even, and she was prepared to maintain, in the very teeth of Michael Angelo's ghost, that Christ, being

neither a Hercules, a gladiator nor a thrower of discs, His name should not be given to a mannikin designed for the display of an artist's familiarity with human anatomy, however great that artist might chance to be; and that, as between Belvidere and Sopra Minerva, the pagan god was by far the greater god, which clearly should not be.

And when, to illustrate still further depths of artistic turpitude, amid that awful wilderness of naked limbs in the Sistine Chapel, she first caught a glimpse of St. Catharine gaily tripping up to the Judgment Bar in a *robe de chambre* of the brightest Paris green, she laughed outright, to the consternation of the worthy custodian (who had hopes of selling a photograph of the Masterpiece at five times its value to this good-looking *forestiere*), for the whole question as to the etiquette and the proprieties to be observed upon that last stupendous gathering of the peoples, came, by some odd freak of fancy, into her mind. Here was a palpable flaw in the creed: resurrection of clothes being nowhere spoken of in the catechism, and Martha began to wonder whether the bones of a certain royal prude would rattle in their coffin or not at the thought of going up *in puris naturalibus* in

the presence of Dudley and all the nations to be judged for a peccadillo or two.

In any case, it seemed only fair that a precedent having been established in the case of St. Catharine, by command of the over-fastidious Paul IV.,—who ordered that the good lady's nakedness should be covered with a *garment of paint*,—the Church, by dogma or otherwise, should provide a resurrectionary costume for beatified ladies ; else, what, for instance, would Ursula and her eleven thousand maidens have to say upon the subject ?

Martha, however, was very young, and, it is to be feared, a trifle irreverent ; though her criticisms upon art were not always taken *cum grano*, as they should have been. A voluminous old lady in bombazine, from Peckham Rye, who had got—heaven knows how!—into the Uffizzi Gallery at Florence, where Martha was then at work as a copyist, and who thought that Scuola di Venezia and Incognito were wonderfully clever artists, rebuked Miss Marty severely for laughing in her face, as she expressed this honest conviction. And as for the gentleman from Chicago, who thought that the Venus de Milo should be ‘repaired,’ it is to be hoped, for many rea-

sons, that he has forgotten the vigour of Martha's language when he communicated to her that practical suggestion.

Martha, however, was thinking of none of these things now. She would have renounced all her household gods, then and there, for the bare elucidation of the mystery which was pressing so heavily upon her heart. All her bright hopes were scattered and broken ; and never in her whole life had she felt so thoroughly desolate and miserable as now. Her nomadic career of recent years had forbidden the cementing of casual intimacies into durable friendships, such as would stand her in good stead in a time of trouble and adversity. She had lived much alone, sustained by an expectation which, though wholly frustrated at last, left her with the compensating reflection that, come what might, to two persons in the world at least she was an object of tender regard. Remembrance of this fact somewhat mitigated the bitterness of her disappointment and chagrin over the day's fiasco; though the comforting reflection was marred, in a degree, by the thought that, as she could not marry both her lovers, in following the bent of her inclinations an honest and loyal heart would of necessity be sorely wounded.

The truth was, that she had failed to evict Charley Smythe from her thoughts in the summary manner she had at first proposed to herself.

She even began to think that she had treated him with undue severity ; for, unless it be a question of serious wrong-doing, there is an almost invariable recoil from the discharge of our more loudly explosive virtues. Charley was faithful and devoted, and it was clear that he loved her dearly, else he, so truthful by nature, would never have sought to compass his ends by a lie. Had Martha taken anything but a superficial view of the matter, she would have remembered that one does not, as a rule, employ heroic measures to enforce a lie. Too much hampering and compressing of the truth often develops in it unexpected detonating qualities ; whereas lies possess a singular capacity for shrinking within themselves, and are capable of disappearing through the smallest of crannies and pin-holes, when actively pursued. Martha, entirely a creature of impulse, had never thought of this, however. Nor was it likely that the reflection had ever occurred to Lottie Cadmus, another party to the wretched business. The fact was unmistakable that an

amiable and well-bred gentleman's linen had been irretrievably ruined through the furious and brutal jealousy of another, who by this very act had forfeited the name of a gentleman. This much was clear, and it was impossible for any young lady of ordinary intelligence to make a mistake as to whose door the blame should be laid. She, of course, knowing of Charley's love for her, was willing to admit, to herself, that there *were* extenuating circumstances in the case; but right *was* right, after all, and Mr. Dexter, for *presuming* to love her also, had certainly been very—very shamefully abused.

Mechanically, at this point in her reflections, she leaned forward in her chair and stirred the fire; whereupon a great spurt of flame burst through the bars, illuminating every corner of the room, and Martha, looking up, caught sight of the unopened letter upon the table once more.

'Who knows?—it may be Dexter's writing after all!' she thought, springing to her feet; and in another moment she had broken the envelope open and was reading, with a beating heart, the signature of Thomas Dexter at the bottom of a closely-written missive.

'He is then in London,' she thought,

bustling about for a match with which to light the gas ; ‘and that was surely him I saw upon Highgate Hill, and if so, what was there so very surprising, after all, about the fact ?—other people besides Mrs. Warren live at Highgate, thank heaven !’ and having found and struck a match by this time, she threw herself once more in her chair, and read, with her blood in a delicious tingle, the following :

‘ Limeborough, Sunday evening.

‘ DEAREST MARTHA,

‘ Since yesterday evening I have been tormented by the devil of impatience. Did you ever spend a sleepless night, listening to slow beating chimes hammering out the quarter hours instead of hours, and making the dawn seem such a far away time that you grew soul-sick with watching for its coming ? If so, darling, I shall not only be surer of your sympathy, but I can the more confidently appeal to your generosity to end a suspense which, in the very beginning, I find to be intolerable. Your kiss, dearest, still burns upon my lips ; but in my ears still ring the words which bade me wait a week for the knowledge that, of a surety, you would be-

come my wife. Would you say to a starving man, "In seven days thou shalt have food?" or to a drowning man, "Be patient: before many days help shall come to thee"? I cannot now conceive why I consented to the delay. Before the door closed upon you last evening, I regretted that I had not urged you to give me an answer then and there. All the night through I felt the sting and the bitterness of that regret; for what to me are sins which do not affect your own sweet self? If your father has erred, between him and his God the matter rests. Upon the conscience of some woman the burden of guilt—if guilt there be—in any case must fall; and for *her* even, there is repentance and pardon, and a life of expiation. So do not longer torment your heart with sorrows to which it can own no manner of kinship. You are my soul's darling, that I know, and that is all I desire to know, beyond the sweet assurance which I am sure you will no longer withhold from me. End my suspense, then, by a line, a single word, and the happiest man in England to-morrow night will certainly be

‘Your devoted slave,

‘THOMAS DEXTER.’

In the sudden exaltation of her feelings from a state of absolute misery and discouragement, Martha rose with a burning face and approached her writing-desk.

‘MY DARLING,’ she wrote,

‘In the midst of sore trouble and affliction, your words have fallen like healing balm upon my ulcerated heart. If that heart, made whole as if by a miracle, is a sufficient recompense to the miracle-worker, it is wholly his own. I lay it joyfully at his feet.

‘MARTHA.’

This she sealed at once without perusal, as if to prevent any reconsideration of a decision which she meant to be irrevocable. Then she paced the floor for a time in deep and earnest thought, preparatory to writing another letter of a far different, and to one loyal heart, at least, of a very desolating import. She felt it to be only just that Charley Smythe should know at once of her determination. For unless his boyish fancy were promptly checked, it might shortly develop into a troublesome passion, which would be certain to more or less retard his choice of a suitable wife. And, indeed, in the course of a few moments’ reflec-

tion upon the subject, she found herself suddenly becoming very solicitous for Charley's matrimonial welfare, and she unselfishly resolved to put herself at once to considerable trouble to find a partner in every way worthy of him.

Why should she not be magnanimous? she thought. As he had always been like a brother to her, why should she not feel a sisterly interest in a matter where her woman's perspicacity might be of signal service to him?

Not that while she was busy in framing these virtuous intentions the question of self-justification failed to present itself to her mind—oh dear no! her thoughts were broken into parentheses of wonder as to what Charley would say of her becoming Mrs. Dexter; and a certain tormenting consciousness that he would, after all, be heart-broken, took up a prominent position in her reflections, and *would* not be ejected thence. But casuistry promptly opened up avenues of escape from a forced contemplation of the unwelcome fact. It is so easy, in any question of wrong-doing, to make subtle distinctions in which our consciences are readily brought to acquiesce;—so easy to discover extenuating circumstances

where the world, not over analytic, can perceive traces of none! Martha had never given Charley encouragement of a degree upon which he could base a charge of inconstancy. True, she had known him for many years, and her acquaintance with Dexter had extended over little more than a week. But what of that? Except in the case of impatient *fiancés*, the almanac and the Precession of the Equinoxes can have no possible correlation with affairs of the heart. The oak is sturdy and strong with the sap of a hundred summers coursing through its veins. But sweet flowers may spring in a single week beneath its shade, and there are those who, in plucking the flower, would never give a loving thought to the oak that, in sunshine and in rain, had sheltered them through all the years of their lives.

A coincident experience in rolling hoop and making sand-pies upon the sea-shore constituted but a feeble claim, thought Martha, upon her matured affections; while the most solemn engagement which could be entered upon at the age of five should be cancelled, she felt, upon the assumption, by the contracting parties, of long dresses and the *toga virilis*.

Charley was a good fellow, and a kind ; handsome and generous, if *not* altogether brave ; but *que voulez vous ?*—suppose he *were* to make the dearest and best of husbands, what had that to do with it ? Her woman's affections had gone out to another, and that, of course, definitively ended the matter.

So she resumed her seat again, and after some reflection, wrote the following :

5, Sebastopol Terrace,
Bayswater. W.

‘ MY DEAR CHARLEY,

‘ I think it best to write at once and tell you that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Dexter. I tried very hard indeed to love you, Charley, for you deserve to win the affection of a better and truer woman than I can ever hope to be. Forgive me if I failed to coerce my heart, which you must remember, my good fellow, is only a woman's heart after all ; and do not think that I am wanting in gratitude for all your kindnesses to me. You have always been a dear, good brother to me, and you must put aside all angry feelings and be my brother still, just as I shall ever be

‘ Your affectionate sister,

‘ MARTY.’

With a delicate consideration, for which she took much credit to herself, she had refrained from any mention of the unfortunate occurrence of Saturday evening.

‘He did it out of love for me, and I should not be too hard upon him, I suppose,’ she said, sealing the letter and directing it to the Magpie and Dolphin, Limeborough.

Fifteen minutes later both letters were dropped into a pillar-box by the servant, whom she now summoned for that purpose.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE BANKERS'.

MR. PALMER had just seated himself at his office desk the next morning, when his neighbour, Mr. Krinkle, burst in upon him with :

‘Ha! Palmer, glad you’re come. What the devil were you up to last evening? According to a letter I have just received from one of my clients, you are involved, with some good-looking female, in a case of conspiracy, house-breaking, robbery on the high seas, and heaven knows what else, for I can’t make head or tail of the business. What is it all about?’

‘Sit down, Krinkle, and don’t talk so *loud*,’ said Mr. Palmer testily; ‘and don’t be so infernally facetious either; did you never make an ass of *yourself*, say!’

‘Only once, my dear fellow—the day I led

Mrs. K. to the altar; but I'd rather you wouldn't ask me that question again.'

This was a clever stroke upon the part of Mr. Krinkle, for Palmer was an old bachelor, and a recital of conjugal miseries invariably put him in a good humour.

'Well,' he said, 'it's the old story, Krinkle. A woman's tom-foolery, of course, and one of the prettiest creatures, too, you ever put your eyes on.'

'Well! well! you don't mean to say that——'

'Don't blink and ogle at me in that way, Krinkle, or I'll put you out of the office. I mean nothing of the kind. I merely intended to remark that a beautiful woman will make as much fuss and noise over a trifle, as the very ugliest of her sex. Look how a hen will cackle her very head off over the laying of a penny egg!'

'I say, Palmer,' retorted Mr. Krinkle, with a laugh, 'a woman and a hen in the same category! That is carrying cynicism a little *too* far. Besides, my experience goes to show that, as a rule, upon the interesting occasions you have mentioned, Mr. Chanticleer kicks up ten times the row that his wife does, and invariably wishes it to be distinctly under-

stood that she deserves no credit whatever for the achievement in question.'

'I thought you wanted to hear all about this business?' said Mr. Palmer, with mock severity.

'I do. Have we finished with the hens and the penny eggs, most learned philosopher?'

'Say another word, and from these premises you go, Mr. Scoffer; but perhaps you would rather have a glass of that old '48 port you got so queer upon the other night.'

'I would,' said Mr. Krinkle; 'not for the crown of England would I tell a lie.'

So Mr. Palmer bustled about with a bottle and glasses in his hand for a time, then, resuming his seat, he said:

'Now, Krinkle, since my client has dragged me into this muddle, I suppose I must tell you the history of the whole affair.'

Which he did, with such reservations as he felt to be essential to Martha's interests; when he had concluded, Mr. Krinkle reflected awhile.

'Hum!' said he at last, 'this promises to be almost as good as a melodrama. You have dropped the elopement theory entirely, I suppose?'

‘Well, I don’t exactly say so, for, you see, there is a good deal of money to be accounted for, and the sooner we endeavour to get at it the better; now that your client is, in a measure, involved in the affair, you, doubtless, are willing to join in the investigation?’

‘My good fellow, that is why I am here. But this Summerfield—what do you think has become of him?’

Mr. Palmer shrugged his shoulders.

‘Of course,’ said Mr. Krinkle, ‘just so; if you knew, the whole mystery would be solved at once; but as you say, the money had better be looked into at once, I think.’

‘At once, and to-day,’ assented Mr. Palmer, warmly. ‘Indeed, Miss Summerfield will shortly be here for that purpose. If agreeable to you, we can visit the bank together.’

Mr. Krinkle, approving of this suggestion, then inquired the name of the firm upon whom the £40,000 draft had been drawn. This involved a reference to the Directory, with the result that Messrs. Agio and Co. Lombard Street, were found to be the bankers in question.

‘Good house, that,’ said Mr. Krinkle; ‘they never would pay such a large sum

unless they were certain of the indorser's identity.'

'By which I am to infer, I suppose, that you believe Mr. Summerfield received the money in person.'

'It is a common-sense view of the case, is it not?'

Mr. Palmer not being able to gainsay an obvious fact, fell back upon the general observation that '*it was* a puzzling affair, and no mistake;' adding: 'if the draft had been for a small amount, I might conceive it to be a case of simple forgery.'

'Which,' rejoined Mr. Krinkle, 'would throw very little light upon the man's disappearance. By the way, Palmer, did your client ever mention the fact of her having a brother?'

'Never.'

'Are you sufficiently well acquainted with her family history to tell me whether she *has* a brother or not?'

Mr. Palmer turned to the speaker with a look of mingled suspicion and surprise.

'Krinkle,' said he, 'you are keeping something back from me; what is it?'

'My good fellow, I have been thinking the same of you for the last fifteen minutes.'

Mr. Palmer pushed back his chair.

‘Confound it, Krinkle! I like that. You are candid now with a vengeance; one would think that instead of an amicable talk, it had been cut, thrust, and parry with us ever since we began.’

‘Well! hasn’t it, my friend?’ rejoined Mr. Krinkle, with undiminished good humour.

‘And what about, pray?’

‘Why, the £40,000, of course. You must confess that it is worth fighting over.’

‘But what have *you* to do with this money, I should like to know?’ demanded Mr. Palmer, in a tone of unaffected surprise.

‘In the event of its recovery, presupposing the death of Mr. Summerfield, of course, your client would claim it at once, I presume.’

‘Exactly so—and why not?’

‘Well, that is just the point. You tell me that she has *not* a brother. For my part, I am not at all sure about that, although I will freely confess that I am still very much in a fog upon the subject. However, should certain vague surmises of mine prove to be correct, a perfectly legitimate claim upon a share of this money would certainly be put forth. There, also, would be the widow’s right of dower.’

‘But there *is* no widow, my dear fellow,’ interposed Mr. Palmer, with an uneasy smile, for he did not exactly like the strange turn the conversation was taking.

‘No widow!’ exclaimed Mr. Krinkle; ‘you surprise me, really! Is Mrs. Summerfield *dead*?’

‘She is.’

‘And your client, then, has come into the residue of Mr. Summerfield’s estate.’

‘Certainly.’

‘Ah! I was not aware of this,’ said Mr. Krinkle reflectively.

‘How could you be expected to know anything about it?’ and Mr. Palmer began to look serious.

‘Sure enough. It only struck me as a coincidence, that is all. Is the amount a large one?’

‘About £30,000, I believe.’

‘Not bad, upon my word—not bad! It *would* be a pity if she were to lose such a comfortable little sum, wouldn’t it?’

‘Why should she lose it? Confound it, Krinkle, you are very oracular in your talk to-day—what do you mean, anyhow?’

‘Well, women are so careless, for one thing, and lend their money upon such

shockingly bad security, and then there is the open chance of the brother turning up.'

At this point Mr. Soper thrust his underdone face into the room and said :

'Miss Summerfield, sir.'

'Show her in—show her in;' and Mr. Palmer abruptly rose and advanced toward the door.

Martha, in spite of several significant patches of court-plaster upon her face, was distractingly pretty this morning. Her solicitor felt it—a sense of it went through and through the good man's consciousness.

'Delighted, Miss Summerfield, delighted, I'm sure;' and as she courtesied and turned with a glance of inquiry toward Mr. Krinkle, he hastily added, with just the slightest tinge of embarrassment in his manner: 'Allow me to present to you Mr. Krinkle. He is the gentleman to whom reference was made last evening, and since Mrs. Warren's name has been dragged—er—mentioned in connection with this affair, he, as her legal adviser, proposes to accompany us to the bank, and, as it were, watch the case, if I may so express it, Mr. Krinkle?'

'You *have* so expressed it, and I may add, that I could not have expounded my inten-

tions in neater terms ;' and Mr. Krinkle, smiling blandly, made an outward wave of the hand, which seemed to imply, 'Thank you, proceed.'

'To watch the case, then,' resumed Mr. Palmer, 'in the interest of his client. This, of course, meets with your approbation, Miss Summerfield ?'

Martha desired nothing better, adding :

'And since this gentleman is to accompany us, had we not better go at once and get the dreadful thing off our minds ?'

'By all means,' the lawyers thought. So that, half an hour later, they arrived in Lombard Street, and were shown, after a preliminary skirmish with the porter, into the private office of Mr. Agio, senior partner of the firm of Agio and Co.

Mr. Palmer briefly explained the object of the visit, giving the date, number, and other particulars of the draft in question.

Mr. Agio, affluent in linen and finger-nails, adjusted his gold eye-glasses, leaned back in his well-cushioned chair, and tapping his white teeth with a lead pencil the while, listened with an unmoved countenance to the story. At its close he said :

'Are you aware, sir, that it is not customary

for us to impart information of this kind to strangers ?’

‘Perfectly,’ said Mr. Palmer; ‘but in a serious matter like the present, red tape and routine should give way to urgency. This lady is the daughter of the gentleman to whom the draft was made payable, and I am her solicitor. Our right to this knowledge therefore is incontestable. I should think, too, that you would be anxious to investigate the matter, involving, as it does, the question of your liability for £40,000.’

‘What do you mean, sir?’ said Mr. Agio, suddenly turning as white as his own immaculate linen.

‘Why, that I shall hold your firm accountable for that amount, if it turns out that you have paid this draft upon a forged indorsement, that is all.’

‘After all these years?’ and Mr. Agio touched a bell upon his table.

‘Certainly,’ said Mr. Palmer; ‘why not?’

A clerk at this moment appeared at the door.

‘Send Mr. Binney to me at once,’ said Mr. Agio, sharply. ‘Mr. Binney,’ he continued, a moment later, as an elderly clerk, with a clean-shaven and ruddy face, stood before

him, 'bring me the foreign ledger for 1861, please.'

When the door had closed again, he turned to Mr. Palmer and said :

'Kindly give me the particulars of that bill once more.'

By the time he had transferred these to a sheet of paper, Mr. Binney reappeared with the ledger.

'Turn,' said Mr. Agio, 'to Messrs. Forbes and Co's account.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Is there a draft for £40,000 charged to them in September?'

'On the 27th—yes, sir.'

'The number, if you please.'

'Ten thousand four hundred and twenty.'

'Now see, Mr. Binney, if it was paid over the counter.'

Mr. Agio was visibly nervous and excited. Pending the clerk's return, he beat upon the desk with his fingers, but was otherwise silent. For her part, Martha felt as she often did at the play, when the interest was fast deepening either into disaster or joy, and the end, for good or evil, was nearly come.

At length Mr. Binney reappeared.

'We received it, sir, I find, through the

morning's exchanges from the clearing-house.'

Mr. Agio's face brightened at once.

'Find the voucher, and bring it to me,' he said, in a tone suggestive of great mental relief.

The lawyers exchanged glances, not exactly of triumph. Both of them were familiar with the ways of the 'City' world. Mr. Agio's colour had returned. He smacked his lips loudly, arranged the papers upon his desk, wiped the nib of his pen, adjusted his shirt-collar, and remarked that 'there didn't seem to be much change in the weather, though his glass,' indicating it with his thumb, '*did* point to "set fair;" but, of course, everybody knew what the English climate was.'

Thought Palmer, 'The man is alive, and has got the money; there has been no foul play, and I am a fool.'

Thought Krinkle, 'Well, he can't be dead; and he has a right to do as he likes with his own; *my* costs are safe enough, and *they* must have patience and wait—that is all.'

Martha only thought, 'Oh dear! I wish this suspense were over!' and bit her nails; and made Palmer feel utterly wretched, by transfixing him with a look which seemed to

say, 'How *could* you have the heart to bring me to this?' Then Mr. Binney returned with the draft, and handed it up, with the air of its being somebody's death-warrant, to his principal, and, assuming a fine graveyard manner, stood aside, and brought a fishy eye to a focus upon Martha, as if she were the condemned in question, and richly deserved all she was about to get.

The play of expression upon Mr. Agio's face as he surveyed the draft through his gold eye-glasses, held it up to the light, surveyed it upside down, lengthwise, crosswise, and from every point of the compass, would have delighted a Lavater, and suggested another chapter for his jaw-cracking and polysyllabic treatise on human grins and wrinkles. That Mr. Agio was sure he had scored a moral victory, and kept unbroken the seals of forty thousand locked-up golden sovereigns, more or less his own, was manifest when, abruptly removing the gold eye-glasses from his nose at last, he rose, and, in an almost joyous manner, presented the draft to Martha for her inspection.

With her, only one glance sufficed. As her eyes fell upon the indorsement, she could only exclaim, 'My God!' and stare, with

whitened lips, at the three men in front of her.

‘Well, well!’ exclaimed the lawyers in a breath.

Her lips only trembled by way of reply, and a tear slowly trickled from her nether eyelid.

‘Speak, my dear girl, speak—what is it?’ said Mr. Palmer soothingly; ‘you have no enemies here!’—and he gave an oblique glance at Krinkle, who winced, and straight-way blew his nose. ‘Something is the matter; come, what is it?’

Mr. Agio immediately rose and said something about a glass of wine, when Martha, starting up, said, ‘No, sir!’ and frightened the banker, not only into his seat again, but into letting off a rolling fire of apologies. ‘No, sir,’ she repeated, ‘it would choke me;’ and making a sudden dash at her pocket, she bit her lips, heaved a long sigh, and pulled forth a number of written documents, to each of which was appended a signature.

‘Look!’ she said, ‘these are the autographs of my father. Compare them with the indorsement upon the draft. See, gentlemen, for yourselves!’ and she hid her face in her hands and wept afresh.

Placed side by side, a single glance sufficed. No possible resemblance was to be traced between the genuine and what now was obviously the false.

The lawyers looked at each other a moment without speaking; then said Krinkle :

‘A forgery, of course?’

‘It looks like it, upon my word it does,’ said Palmer, wagging his head.

‘Well!’

‘Well?’

‘And Mr. Summerfield, of course he must be——’ and, catching Martha’s uplifted eyes, he stopped.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘I understand. He must be dead!’ and this time she sobbed aloud.

An awkward pause ensued.

Said Palmer at length, dashing heroically through sentiment and tears :

‘Well, Mr. Agio, this, you see, proves to be a bad business. What is to be done about it?’

Mr. Agio shrugged his shoulders, and looked for one instant a picture of compassion and distress :

‘Ah, sir! I wish I were in a position to help you. It is sad—very sad! You see—take it and examine it—you see the draft

came originally from Messrs. Hanway and Co., who must have cashed it without a sufficient knowledge of the indorser ; that being, as you are doubtless aware, no concern of ours. The draft was good ; we accepted it as a matter of course ; received it from the clearing-house the following day, and paid it, with many others, as is our daily custom. We knew nothing of Mr. Charles Summerfield ; it was not our business to know, unless he presented the draft in person to one of our cashiers, when we certainly should have required a satisfactory identification. Messrs. Hanway and Co., if they still existed as a firm, would be bound, as a matter of course, to explain to whom they paid this large sum of money, and for what reason, if they were *not* personally acquainted with the indorser. But, unfortunately, Messrs. Hanway and Co. collapsed a few years ago, leaving little else than emptiness, so far as assets are concerned, behind them. Their books were full enough, being crammed with overdrawn accounts, or advances based upon such broken reeds as Peruvian and Nicaraguan bonds. They paid a dividend or two, I believe—a comical business—which led up to a lively demand for microscopes, and caused the depositors to

remove their hats whenever the Three per Cents. were mentioned in their presence. It is a great pity, of course. Forty thousand pounds is not to be sneezed at. I should not think of sneezing at it myself. I have known people's hair to turn grey over one half the sum. But——' And Mr. Agio shrugged his shoulders, as much as to say: 'Well, I know it's painful, but really I cannot help it, and tears are strictly prohibited in this office;' then continued aloud: 'Mr. Binney, you may go now. Everything is quite correct and business-like, so far as *we* are concerned.'

As the ancient clerk vanished from view, Mr. Palmer awoke as one from a trance, and said:

'Is this thing, then, to be traced no further?'

'Well,' rejoined Mr. Agio, after a moment's reflection; 'you are at liberty to "trace" as much as you please. I should do as much if I were in your place. Why not? £40,000 is a considerable sum—a small fortune, perhaps; enough to treat the whole of Great Britain, say, to its daily allowance of five million glasses of bitter-beer; but business you know, sir, is business: and I have a number of pressing engagements upon my hands.'

‘Just so, sir;’ and Mr. Palmer arose. ‘Who are the liquidators of this valuable estate, Mr. Agio?’ he added, when he had found his hat, and had twice stroked it the wrong way in his agitation.

‘I cannot say. Factor and Jones, the accountants, might tell you—the books are probably still in their hands; if not, the liquidators have them. You might trace the matter out, if you could get access to the accounts; but have no delusions about making a claim upon the estate, the time has passed for that; and in any case, as I have already said, a pin was sufficient to prick the whole inflated concern. There was nothing but office-stools and ledgers left. Still,’ and here Mr. Agio rose, and turned with a compassionate smile towards Martha; ‘still, should you require any further evidence upon the subject, Miss Sumnerfield, you may always consider me yours to command.’

‘Well, Krinkle, *your* client is out of the mess, at all events,’ said Palmer, when they gained the street.

‘Humph! I don’t know about that. However, Factor is a friend of mine, and I think I shall go and hunt him up at once.’

‘As for me, I shall return to Bayswater,’

said Martha, in a tone of the profoundest dejection.

‘And I have an engagement at my office at twelve,’ said Mr. Palmer, looking at his watch.

So the three separated then and there. Upon his return to Lincoln’s Inn Fields, Mr. Palmer found, waiting for him, a handsome, but somewhat haggard, young gentleman, who immediately arose from his chair, and said :

‘My name is Smythe. You probably received a letter from me?’

‘Yes, yes—I did,’ said Mr. Palmer, removing his gloves and extending his hand. ‘Glad to see you; pray, resume your seat, and draw nearer to the fire. I observe that you have a very severe cold.’

‘Yes; I took a swim in a frozen river the other day,’ said Charley, ‘and I found, too, that it wasn’t just the best thing in the world for a fellow’s constitution and bye-laws.’

‘Did you fall overboard, sir?’ asked Mr. Palmer, with a look of surprise, as he recalled Martha’s version of her recent misadventure.

Charley’s look of disgust was a sight for the gods.

‘No—oh no; a young lady challenged

me to a swimming match, and, of course, *being* a young lady, there it was, you see.'

'And you actually——'

"'Actually" is no word for it. I took a header into the water—water so cold that it made my very finger-nails peel—and got beaten like the devil.'

'By the lady?'

'No, no; the poor lady went into a mere heap of clothes, after her first stroke. I was beaten by a clergyman, who swam on dry land while I paddled in the water, swathed, as you might say, in this young lady, and frightfully handicapped—don't you call it?—in the race.'

'Excuse me, sir,' said Mr. Palmer, blandly, 'but you are a trifle—er—ambiguous. Do you mean me to infer that it was *you* who so gallantly saved Miss Summerfield's life?'

'Gallantry be blowed! it was *love*, Mr. Palmer; hang it—there, it's out, and I don't care—love, sir, *love*. I adore her, and I *did* it.'

'Well, but——'

'Oh, but you have heard another tale, of course! I see, Martha has been here. Come, come, don't be afraid—I'm not a man-eater. She has been here, hasn't she?'

‘Well, yes.’

‘And she told you how this doxology chap prevented her from entering heaven before her time?’

‘Well, yes—she did; if you mean by the “doxology chap” the Reverend Mr. Dexter?’

‘Reverend! see here, hold on! I looked up that word in Webster, to-day. I’ve got it here in my pocket, somewhere. One minute. Oh, here it is: “Reverend: worthy of reverence; entitled to respect mingled with fear and affection.” You hear that?’

‘I do.’

‘Then why call this Dexter a reverend, when he is entitled to neither fear, affection, nor respect? Excuse me, Mr. Palmer, but I hope he is not a friend of yours?’

‘Not an acquaintance even.’

‘Don’t say, then, that heaven has not smiled on *you*. Well, is it permissible to use a little bad language in a lawyer’s office when there are no women about?’

Mr. Palmer smiled.

‘That’s enough,’ said Charley, and he straightway launched forth upon a narrative that considerably astonished the worthy solicitor. ‘So you see just how it is,’ said he, in conclusion; ‘she believes him to be a

hero—a real bronze god, instead of a plaster of Paris one—and *I* am a coward, a worsted-stocking knave, who would shiver at the sight of a puddle of muddy water, and run from a stickleback. *He*—what is it?—poses as her saviour, and I am kicked out of my uncle's house for exposing him in the presence of a room full of gentlemen, and for throwing a glassful of wine in the reverend humbug's face.'

'What! what!' and Mr. Palmer smiled grimly.

'Yes,' said Charley, 'I told him right out before them all that he was a liar, and instead of resenting it like a white man, he only whined like a poodle dog. So, you see, I was bound to call him a coward, and thought a baptism of some of uncle's expensive claret might wake him up a bit, but it *didn't*; uncle got up instead—a good-natured man, with a will of cast iron. Said he: "Apologize!" "What!" thought I, "apologize for exposing a humbug! never! I'd rather be torn to pieces by a Minnesota saw-mill!" So I got kicked out—and here I am.'

'Well,' said Mr. Palmer, laughing, 'you must confess that your's was *rather* a summary proceeding for an English drawing-room.'

'Well, what could I do? His cry was,

"I am a clergyman." They tell me he bought a pulpit out there on the marshes, as a less educated man would buy a stall in a fish market, and claims, by that reason, to have gained in soul what he has lost in muscle; so he couldn't come out on the lawn, you see, and have it out in the usual English fashion; and not knowing exactly how such a dead and live hosanna as that could be exasperated into a comfortable little set-to, I resolved to try the effect of uncle's best claret upon his shirt front. It was no good, however; it nearly made the pious gentleman *cry*. There! don't laugh, I am just becoming serious. You were right about the claret; it *was* too good to waste in that manner. I was quite in the wrong. I should have just caught him alone in his own graveyard some fine evening, and had it out among the tombstones. It would have been much better. I wrote and told uncle so, but he hasn't thought it worth his while to send an answer. In fact, that is exactly how matters stand. Lottie showed me her adorable little back, and uncle, pointing with that dreadful finger-nail of his down the carriage drive to the main road, meant that I should wander, an accursed Yankee, from Elysium to the devil.'

‘Meaning me, Mr. Smythe?’

‘Good heavens! no! and that brings me back to Elysium again, Mr. Palmer. Here I am, you see, in England, a country, I am told, with a wonderful history—but an exceptionally moist climate—a country, sir, in which it is impossible to get a nip of Bourbon whisky, or a brandy-smash, and here am I, dead in love with a girl who thinks I can’t swim, scorned by her, and forced to see the favours she openly bestows upon a man who can float like a steam-hammer and lie like that great ancestor of his who tempted Eve in the garden. Here I am, I say, a pilgrim and a stranger—worse than alone, more than sick, discouraged through and through, and in a deuce of a funk generally. I came over to help Martha, and succeed in helping her to a new sweetheart, who has a soul a trifle smaller than a pin’s head, and a honey-bee’s fondness for fresh flowers. I have rendered myself personally obnoxious to her. I have jumped upon every one of her corns. I am a brute, an ignoramus. I have never got up in a pulpit and perplexed my fellow men with the scriptural rule of three—I don’t know what the Thirty-nine Articles are made of. I only know that I was lifted out of the door by

uncle's boot—a number eleven, I should think, by the size of it—and chucked, as it were, into the middle of the road—that is all. But I don't despair, Mr. Palmer. I came across the pond to help her, and I mean to do it. I won't give it up; no little temporary misunderstanding like that shall stop me. Girls are adorable; still, they are girls, and they *will* do things that make a fellow shudder to think of; but Marty, I really believe, is an exception to the rule. She will never squander herself upon a man like Dexter. She will see through him as if he were a pane of glass. I am sure of that. And now, Mr. Palmer, I wish you would kindly tell me what has been going on for the last two or three days. I am in a kind of a fog, you see, and to be of any use to her I must, of course, know exactly how matters stand.'

'Ah, well!' commenced Mr. Palmer, in a dubitative manner, when Charley broke in again with:

'And there is another thing, I shall require the services of a lawyer myself; and if you will kindly undertake to keep me straight, I shall feel much obliged.'

'Thank you, Mr. Smythe, it will give me much pleasure to serve you in any way, I am

sure ; but you can scarcely expect me to reveal to you the secrets of my other clients.'

'Certainly not,' said Charley, colouring ; 'but Miss Summerfield never has had any secrets from me, and it is not at all probable that she is going to begin now. I have known her too long and too intimately for that, and——'

'By the way,' interposed Mr. Palmer, 'excuse my abruptness, but can you tell me whether Miss Summerfield has a brother ?'

Charley opened his eyes wide with astonishment : 'A brother !' he repeated, 'why, no—of course not.'

'A half-brother, then ?'

'Never heard of any, and don't believe it.'

'You knew *Mrs.* Summerfield, as a matter of course ?'

'Yes, oh yes ! I knew *her* well enough.'

'A French lady, was she not ?'

'A thoroughbred—— She couldn't speak English worth a cent.'

'Do you know if he was a widower when he married her ?'

'Couldn't say, really ; but what are you driving at, anyhow ? What the deuce is up *now* ?'

Mr. Palmer laughed. 'Nothing,' he said ;

‘but it is your turn now ; so listen.’ And beginning with what Martha witnessed in Mrs. Brophy’s bedchamber, he related to the minutest detail all that had since then occurred.

Meanwhile, Charley paced the floor in considerable excitement, pausing now and then to ask a question, or exclaim ‘Poor girl!—poor girl!’ and hurrying on again as if he were a soldier on duty, or a pedestrian walking against time for heavy odds. Then, as Mr. Palmer concluded, he stopped in front of the latter’s desk, and said :

‘Please give me a memorandum of that Highgate address, Mr. Palmer, and also of the contents of Mrs. Brophy’s box.’

While the lawyer was complying with the request, Charley approached the window in a mechanical way, and stared vacantly into the street below. Suddenly, his face flushed crimson, and he cried out :

‘Mr. Palmer—quick!’

Mr. Palmer was at his side in an instant.

‘You see the fellow coming out of here,’ said Charley, pointing eagerly at a figure in black, which at that moment reached the gate of the forecourt.

Mr. Palmer, following the indication, saw the man, and said so.

‘Well, that is Dexter, the Reverend Judas Dexter of Deadwick ; and I wonder what the deuce *can* be up now. Just let me have that memorandum, please ; and where’s my hat ?—will see you again by-and-by.’

And before Mr. Palmer could interpose a word, Charley burst, to Mr. Soper’s intense amazement, like a whirlwind into the outer office, and as quickly disappeared into the hall and down the stairs.

If his object was to interrupt Dexter, he arrived too late, however ; for Mr. Palmer, watching from the window, beheld him standing upon the pavement below, and gazing, in a bewildered way, first in one direction and then in another. Then the lawyer saw him leap into a hansom and disappear through an adjoining archway.

‘Mr. Soper,’ he said, a moment later, ‘has anybody called since my return ?’

Nobody had called.

Then, entering Mr. Krinkle’s office, on the next floor, he demanded of the chief clerk :

‘Who was the clerical-looking gentleman I saw coming out from here just now ?’

‘Mr. Dexter, sir.’

‘A client of Mr. Krinkle’s ?’

‘Not exactly; he is a friend, I believe, of one of our lady clients.’

‘Mrs. Warren, of Highgate?’

‘Well, I didn’t say so,’ laughing.

‘That is all!—thank you very much;’ and returning to his own office, Mr. Palmer had much food for reflection during the remainder of the day.

CHAPTER IV.

MR. SMYTHE VISITS OAK LODGE.

FAILING to obtain any clue to Dexter's sudden disappearance, Charley resolved to visit Mrs. Warren without delay. He had no definite object in this, beyond an ardent desire to shield Martha from such consequences of her folly as he felt were to be apprehended from that somewhat redoubtable quarter. But just how this was to be accomplished, or with what pretext he must needs arm himself for the encounter, he had not the remotest idea as he hailed a passing cab.

'Oak Lodge, Highgate,' said he, having recourse to Mr. Palmer's memorandum.

'What part of Highgate, sir?'

'Who is running this cab, you or I?'

Cabby touched his hat.

'Right, sir. Glass up or down, sir? It's beginning to rain a little.'

‘Down. Got a good horse?’

‘There ain’t none better in London, sir?’

‘That’s right. Always be truthful, cabby. Go on.’

Rosinante’s pace was not a break-neck one, in spite of a plentiful administration of whipcord ; but fifteen minutes’ bumping and jolting through the Gray’s-Inn Road and Maiden Lane brought them to Holloway. Charley, feeling cold, wiped the moisture from the glass, and saw the sign of the Brecknock Arms close at hand.

‘Stop!’ he cried, through the trap-door in the roof, and the cab-wheels straightway scraped against the kerb.

‘Are you a Good Templar, cabby?’ he added, from the side-walk.

A derisive smile spread over the cabby’s features.

‘When the publics is closed — yes, sir, always.’

‘You good honest man! Well, step in, and get what you want.’

Charley, drinking a negus in the private bar, a moment later got into an animated conversation with the two presiding divinities, when interruption came. Said a voice at his elbow :

‘Is it Mrs. Warrens’s, sir, as you’re a looking for?’

And turning, he found his own particular Jehu, and another, in a greasy wide-awake by his side.

‘‘Cause,’ resumed the speaker, ‘this cab-man here, he knows the place, havin’, so to speak, found it out hisself, for a young lady and gent, not mor’n five days ago, was it, Topps?’

‘A young lady, about twenty-one or two, good colour, not very tall, fine—*very* fine figure. Eh?’ interrupted Charley eagerly.

Our old friend—for it was he—winked and nodded his head, and showed three or four remarkable snags as he answered:

‘Well, if she wasn’t a fine ’un, then *I* ain’t no judge o’ fine ’uns, that’s all; but the gent! Lor, sir, the gent! Well, I ’ad to larf. Such a poor putty-complected a-looking indiividual I never see in all my life, an’, Lor’ bless you, I’ve seen a many rum ’uns too, *I* have. But he warn’t mean,’ added Topps, wagging his head and looking with preternatural solemnity from one to the other. ‘You can arsk the young lady there ahind the counter if he didn’t come down handsome. Says he, “Topps, are you dry?” says

he, an' I spoke up honest and says, "Well, I never yit knew the time when I wasn't," I says, an' he come right down—I'll say that for him; he was a werry narsty and unwhole-some-lookin' party, but he come right down.'

'Look here,' said Charley, conscious by this time that nothing could be gained by further parley in this quarter, 'look here, old topsy-turvy, or whatever your name is, I have got no time now to talk to you, but that young lady was a friend of mine, and she brought you half a crown's worth of luck. There, take it and wet your whistle, for it's getting awfully wheezy. Come, cabby, you know the way now, I suppose?'

'Right, sir;' and in another moment they were off again, with Topps waving benedictions from afar; down into a hollow between gaunt hedgerows, with smoking brickyards on one side and broad fields stretching as far as the grey walls of Holloway prison on the other, with Highgate church and a grassy slope densely sprinkled with grave-stones visible at last, then a quagmire at the bottom of the hill, and a toilsome ascent to the main street upon its summit. Finally, the narrow lane, the high walls, and the garden-gate labelled Oak Lodge.

‘I wonder if she will know me again,’ thought Charley, as he pulled the bell-handle. ‘Wasn’t she just a splendid woman, though! Such a figure! but then, I suppose she has changed—women *do* change so; it’s the worse thing about them. Hallo! here’s somebody coming!’

Joey, who now opened the gate, was by daylight a bleary-eyed, dropsical-looking little man in rusty black, ‘tottery’ about the legs, and palpably addicted to the use of snuff and red silk handkerchiefs.

‘Mrs. Warren at home?’ said Charley, pushing at once into the garden, and looking up with some curiosity at the upper windows of the house.

‘Yes, sir,’ said Joey. ‘Your card, sir, *if* you please.’

‘Tell her Mr. Smythe from America has called—that will be sufficient.’

‘Orders is strict, sir. We ’ad quite enough of strangers getting into the ’ouse last evening; we ’ad, an’ I don’t care about ’aving my blessed ’ed took orf again by the missis, I don’t.’

Charley laughed, and surrendered at discretion. Admitted to the drawing-room, he had not long to wait, but in the brief interval

preceding Mrs. Warren's appearance at the doorway, he found his courage dribbling perceptibly away. Having, as we have said, no definite object in view beyond ascertaining for himself the exact condition of affairs, and ward off as much as lay in his power the consequences of Martha's indiscretion, he began to look forward with some anxiety to the coming interview.

His first impression was, as Mrs. Warren swept with all her old grace of manner into the room, that she was just as handsome as ever. His original judgment, far from erring, as he sometimes felt might have been the case, was in reality strengthened and reinforced by sight of the well-remembered face and figure. There was, however, no sign of recognition in the eyes which fell at once with a look of inquiry and surprise upon him as she approached. Obviously, his name and his face were equally unfamiliar to her, and there came to him at this instant the mortifying reflection that, at the best, he could only have hoped to be remembered as a child with whom she had once whiled away a few idle hours.

He rose from his chair in some embarrassment and said :

‘You have forgotten me, I see, Mrs. Warren. I met you six years ago in Perth Amboy.’

Her brow immediately darkened, seeing which, he hastily added :

‘At the hotel there; and you may recall the circumstance of my having pointed out Mr. Summerfield’s villa to you upon the evening of your arrival.’

Evidently this was an unlucky remark, for a more rigid contraction of her brow took place as she listened, and Charley began to have an uncomfortable perception that she was in no wise overjoyed to renew their acquaintance.

‘I failed to recognise you,’ she said, coldly; ‘you were very young upon the occasion to which you have been good enough to refer. Pray be seated.’

‘Yes,’ he answered, with a ghastly smile, ‘I *was* rather young at that time;’ and as her face only darkened, and the keen look of inquiry in her eyes seemed to say with terrible emphasis, ‘Your business here, if you please?’ he added in lieu of anything better : ‘Yes, I was quite a child then—just about fifteen, I think.’

Still she made no answer.

This was both awkward and unexpected ; but there was nothing left to do but to boldly plunge *in medias res*. Said he, with drooping eyelids :

‘There was a row up here last night, I believe? and I thought I’d come up on the strength of our old acquaintance, and we’d talk the thing over.’

Having delivered himself in this wise, he looked up from a contemplation of the carpet-pattern, and found those steady imperturbable eyes still upon him.

‘Well, well! proceed,’ she answered, curtly.

‘Well,’ he resumed, ‘I think, in the first place, that Miss Summerfield did very wrong.’

‘One moment,’ interposed Mrs. Warren. ‘Were you sent here by *her*?’

Charley detected a sneer in the tones of her voice, and he fired up in an instant.

‘I was sent here by nobody,’ he said. ‘What I know, I learned from Mr. Palmer an hour ago. Miss Summerfield is not even aware that I am in London ; but I will tell you frankly, Mrs. Warren, that my object in coming here is to set her straight in your good opinion, if I can.’

‘You have set yourself a difficult task, Mr. Smythe. What can be your motive? You

are not this young person's solicitor. Are you a relative ?'

'No. Oh no ; I take a great interest in her—that is all ;' and Charley coloured deeply.

'I think I understand the case now ; and though I fail to perceive that you have the slightest claim upon my time and attention, I am not disinclined to listen. Proceed ; but no special pleading, please.'

'Well, it is just this,' said Charley. 'Miss Summerfield—whatever anybody may say to the contrary—is one of the best little girls in the world. She is wilful, though—oh yes, I won't dispute it ; but, goodness gracious ! what girls are *not* like that ? You, probably, were so once yourself, and know how it is ; such a thing might be ; and as for her, she'll grow out of it in time. We all do when we have cracked our heads three or four times against stone walls and things. Conceit, I think, *has* to be knocked out of us in that way ; don't you ? Well, I told her from the first, that if she thought you had anything to do with her father's disappearance, she ought to come and tell you so, give her reasons, and hear what you had to say. Palmer told her pretty much the same thing. But that

Brophy woman put different ideas into her head ; and what's more, I'll bet two to one that it was all her doings that Marty made such a fool of herself here last evening. So you musn't be too hard on her, after all. If she had waited a day or two longer, or had gone to the bankers' first to see about that draft, none of this confounded nonsense would have happened. She sees it all now, of course ; and she admits herself that her father *must* be dead.'

'Dead !'

Mrs. Warren, white as a ghost, had sprung to her feet, and, bending her startled face down to Charley's, repeated :

'Dead ! Is he really dead ?'

'Jove ! Didn't I tell you about that ? Well, this is what happened this morning.' And Charley straightway narrated all that had occurred at the office of Messrs. Agio and Co., two hours before.

As Mrs. Warren listened, her brow cleared, a tinge of colour returned to her cheeks, and a mere ghost of a smile flickered an instant about her lips. Then she walked the floor in silence for several moments. At last she said :

'I am greatly indebted to you for this intelligence, Mr. Smythe.'

Which was spoken in such an amicable tone, that Charley thought to himself at once, 'I was a fool; what better pretext need I have had than that for my visit here?' So he spoke aloud, using what was left of the opportunity.

'I meant to have told you that when I first came in, but, somehow, you frightened it out of me.'

Mrs. Warren laughed.

'I have been very rude to you, Mr. Smythe, and you must forgive me,' she said, frankly extending her hand.

'Oh! there, that's nothing. How did you know but that I was up to some game or another in coming here to-day? I don't blame you in the least; and, I suppose, if I had been in your place last evening, and had found a strange fellow in the house, letting loose some of my relations, I should have bounced him out in a hurry. But you mustn't forget what I told you about the Brophy woman—Parker, I mean, of course; and there is something I heard about *her*, this morning, which is worth looking into, too, in my opinion.'

'You excite my curiosity very much,' said Mrs. Warren; and Charley, looking closely,

might have discerned certain traces of anxiety in her manner.

‘Well,’ he continued, ‘as I told you just now, I have not seen Miss Summerfield for several days. Not, however, through any fault of mine, for I should like to see her very much indeed; but the fact is, we have had a little misunderstanding.’

‘Ah! that is very bad.’

‘Yes; and what is worse,’ pursued Charley, ‘a fraud of a minister is at the bottom of the whole business; but I’ll skip him for the present. So, what I know, I learned, of course, from Mr. Palmer. Last Wednesday afternoon, Miss Summerfield, in attempting to cross a river, broke through the ice, and came very near being drowned.’

Once more Mrs. Warren turned deathly pale. She gave a sudden gasp, and was upon the point of some hasty utterance, when she checked herself with an effort, and merely said,

‘Well.’

Charley had noticed the movement.

‘Perhaps,’ said he, ‘she mentioned the fact to you last evening?’

Mrs. Warren shook her head.

‘No; go on.’

‘Well,’ resumed Charley, ‘the result of this accident was that she was carried into Brophy’s house, where, of course, she was obliged to pass the night. Now it appears that Parker has a bad habit of walking in her sleep, and keeps a certain mysterious box, which she makes a practice of visiting at such times, in her spare bedchamber. So it chanced, on this particular night, that Miss Summerfield witnessed a very curious performance indeed. Parker hadn’t much money of her own, had she?’

‘None at all, that I am aware of.’

‘Ah, well! she has plenty now; for Martha got out of bed, looked over her shoulder into the box, and saw a lot of securities as well as a bank-book, showing a deposit at the Bank of England of several thousand pounds. Now, where did she get this money? I bet her old man knows nothing about it. What do *you* think it all means?’

Mrs. Warren, once more pacing the floor, has a good many more thoughts upon the subject than she is for the present inclined to reveal.

‘These Brophys live at Deadwick, do they not?’ she asked, suddenly pausing in her walk.

‘Yes; oh yes!’

‘When can you make it convenient to go there with me?’

Charley stared.

‘Why, you don’t intend——’ he began.

‘Yes, I do intend to know how she came by that money. I have a reason for it.’

Charley was thoughtful a moment.

‘I was just thinking,’ he said, ‘that old Brophy is a very good honest fellow, and he’d be very much cut up, I know, if any harm came to his “missis,” as he calls her; but I suppose, if anything *were* wrong and restitution were made, Marty in that case wouldn’t be very hard on him.’

‘Oh, I am sure Marty wouldn’t,’ said Mrs. Warren, with a strange smile, which Charley afterwards had good cause to remember. ‘Come, Mr. Smythe, we took a number of expeditions together in America; do you decline to join me in this?’

‘No, no; I didn’t say I wouldn’t go. I was only thinking what the old man would say about it, that was all. Certainly, I will go; when shall it be?’

‘In the course of a day or two, I will make an appointment with you by post, if you will kindly give me your address.’

‘That will do,’ said he; and taking a pencil from his pocket, he wrote his address upon a card, and gave her.

‘And now,’ continued Mrs. Warren, ‘I want you to tell me, if you will, all about that accident, and the misunderstanding with Miss Marty, as you call her; and if I can do anything to correct that misunderstanding, in exchange for the valuable information you have just given me, I pledge my word of honour that I shall spare no effort or exertion to do it.’

It struck Charley that this was strange talk to come from such a quarter; but it was said with such apparent sincerity, and such remarkable emphasis, that it made quite an impression upon him, nevertheless.

So he told her the whole story from beginning to end.

There was no smile upon her face as she listened. Her features were as rigid as marble, her lips tightly compressed.

‘I do not doubt your sincerity, Mr. Smythe,’ she said, when he had finished; ‘but—’ (here she paused, and bit her lips again) ‘but what you have said surprises me greatly.’

Charley flamed up at once.

‘Ah! I suppose, then, you, too, have heard

Mr. Dexter's pretty tale, and believe it with the rest. Upon my soul, this is too bad, Mrs. Warren. Here, look at my broken fingernails; see how the skin upon my fingers is cut and torn with clawing at that infernal ice! Just listen for one minute to this cough, which is racking and shaking me to pieces; above all, look me fair and square in the eyes, and read a lie in them if you can.'

'Yes, yes,' she answered, 'I see, I hear, I believe you!' And to Charley's amazement she clenched her fist and ground her teeth, and for a moment looked downright murderous. Then, she spoke again:

'This Mr. Dexter, you say, is engaged to your cousin?'

'Well, as good as engaged—yes.'

'Just so; I understand. I think you said her name was Cadmus?'

'Yes.'

'And she lives in Limeborough?'

'Yes.'

'And is of an excellent family?'

'Decidedly—is she not my cousin?' and Charley laughed.

'She is rich, you say?'

'Very.'

'Good looking?'

‘ Awfully. *Such* a figure !’

‘ Accomplished ?’

‘ She can give a minister twenty-five points on theology and beat him. She knows all the languages, from Hebrew to Irish ; and I saw her bust two piano-strings myself the other day, and she wasn’t in the humour for playing, either.’

‘ Humph ! Is she fond of Mr. Dexter ?’

‘ That’s the worst thing about her. She always looks as though she could eat him up ; and I wish to gracious, if her digestion were good enough to stand it, that she would just gulp him right down some day. It would be a nice death for *him*, and we should all very soon get over the loss. As for me, I am not a bit revengeful. I’d be willing to erect a monument to his memory at my own expense, and wouldn’t begrudge a list of virtues in gilt letters a yard long : it would be good fun for the antiquarian some of these days, and jolly good practice for the stone-cutters.’

At this point interruption came. A visitor was announced, and Mrs. Warren had just time to say :

‘ Your face will burn some day when you think over what you have just said ; but I cannot blame you ; and if it is any satisfac-

tion for you to hear it, I will tell you in confidence that Mr. Dexter will *never* marry your friend.'

Charley jumped to his feet.

'But—but——' he said.

She extended her hand as her visitor entered.

'There is no "but" in the question,' she whispered; 'the oracle has spoken; have faith and believe.'

He pondered much upon the meaning of these words, during the remainder of the day. He sat upon them for eight mortal hours before it occurred to him that oracles' eggs might be only so many addled delusions after all, and therefore not worth so much persistent sitting upon.

CHAPTER V.

TOO LATE.

CHARLEY felt very miserable and dejected when he rose the next morning. His sleep had been disturbed by evil dreams, and his cough, so sadly neglected by him, had proved more troublesome than usual during the night. Some disquieting influence, some gnawing unbelief, was at work in that once cheerful mind, and the hum of a mendacious, mayhap, but persistent oracle filled his sleeping and waking thoughts, and bred in him a heart-terror far worse than physical pain.

Charley, as you must have long since perceived, was a young gentleman endued with qualities very excellent in their way, but widely differing from those to which thrifty men of the world, as a rule, are mainly indebted for their success. It is not by any means a pleasant reflection that the good

Samaritan would be more or less of an anachronism in these bustling and time-serving days—when, to ensure that measure of prosperity which the world approves, one must forswear all kindliness of heart, and look upon magnanimity as more or less a matter of personal interest; when charity itself becomes a question to be adjusted to fine considerations of policy, and a tender regard for the misfortunes of others is esteemed solely as an evidence of personal weakness. But who will say that there is not superior wisdom, after all, in these things? The thunder-bolt, with its mission to fulfil, does not turn aside because a flower, however fragrant, lies in its path; and the rain, in its beneficence to the many, is indifferent to the personal comfort of the Queen of England herself. Parables, however, are not needed in this place; for who is there among us again of the tender-hearted species, who does not feel at times with envy that the man is right who can not only say ‘No’ in the proper place, with decision and energy, but can, with equal decision and energy, refuse to take ‘No’ for an answer, when that monosyllabic obstacle is thrust in the pathway to some high design or ambition.

So Charley, ignorant of the fact that a too ready condonation is simply an incentive to further wrong-doing, and, in many other respects, deplorably ignorant of human nature, deserves little sympathy, perhaps, from a worldly point of view, for his weakness in accepting the humiliation which had recently been put upon him. But some allowance should surely be made for his indisposition, which was of a far more serious nature than he, in his gloomiest moments, had imagined. This morning, his comely face looked hard and worn, his cheeks were sunken, and there was only an expression of dull misery in his eyes, as he moved listlessly about his chamber.

He had finished dressing, when a knock came at the door, which, when opened, revealed a servant, with two letters in her hand. One of them, forwarded from the Magpie and Dolphin, he saw, at a glance, was from Martha; and his heart beat violently as he thanked the bearer and reclosed the door. 'She had relented then, and had sent for him,' was his joyful thought, as, with flushed cheeks and trembling hands, he tore open the envelope. But suddenly his face blanched, a film gathered before his eyes, a

sharp pain sped through his temples, his lips quivered, and as he leaned back against the wall for support, the letter slipped from his fingers and fell to the floor.

For a moment every faculty within him seemed crushed and whelmed in the great billow of despair which swept over his soul. He could only exclaim, in accents half choked in rising tears :

‘My God! then it’s really true!’

Then a reaction set in. He read the letter through to the end, and ground his teeth in impotent rage. Impotent! Why *should* he submit to such an indignity as this? He could as soon teach the lightning to walk through a minuet as *force* Martha’s love, that he knew perfectly well. But he had a few rights of his own, after all—among others, the privilege of asserting them; and, by thunder! if he wouldn’t do it, too! He had been a fool long enough. He had been too tender, too patient, by half. He would change all that now. He would show Martha what hot metal there was in him upon occasion. He would not be rough or abusive. No, no; but wouldn’t he just speak his mind though! He was tired of being treated as a child. He hated to be sneered at. He

wanted justice, and he meant to have it. He should insist upon her taking no further steps until he could show up her fine clerical lover in his true colours. All he wanted was a fair chance and an open field. The whole thing was absurd, monstrous; the most infernal nonsense he had ever read or heard of. It must be the country, the air, the fog, some peculiarity of the British constitution. Surely if he had pulled a girl out of a river in his own country he wouldn't be called a coward, get kicked out of a gentleman's house, and be snubbed by the girl for doing it. Jove! the next time, he would take the woman by the nape of the neck and hold her head under water until she was ready to throw her arms about *his* neck for gratitude, and the people came down with flowers and bunting to build triumphal arches for him—that's what he would do!

By this time he had his hat and overcoat on. He had forgotten all about the unopened letter; he had thrust it with Martha's into his pocket.

'And to think,' he went on, as he descended the stairs, 'to think that Marty could be such a little hypocrite as to thank me for my many kindnesses! Bah! I am

beginning to *hate* women.' In proof of which he hailed a passing hansom, and drove like mad in the direction of Bayswater.

On the way he bethought himself of the second letter, which he straightway opened and read. It was from Mrs. Warren, appointing Friday as the day for the visit to Deadwick. A postscriptum reminded him of her promise of aid, and asked, as a particular favour, that no mention should be made to his 'lady friend' of his visit to Oak Lodge on the preceding day.

'Now I wonder what she means by that?' he thought. 'You can bet your bottom dollar there is *something* in it;' but his reflections upon the subject were cut short by his arrival at Sebastopol Terrace. He asked at the door to see Miss Summerfield. Martha, apprised by the servant of his presence, suddenly recalled the fact that she had been guilty of an imprudence. She had put her address in the letter she had written to Charley. So she sent down word for the name of her visitor, and, ascertaining it, declined to see him; for she dreaded the scene which she was sure would follow his admission to her apartments, and much preferred that no questions should be asked at present about her visit to Oak

Lodge. Moreover, her conscience, since yesterday, had been prodding deeply into what little store of self-complacency had survived that unfortunate affair.

‘No, I won’t be bothered any more. Tell him I cannot receive him,’ she said.

But Charley, urging pressing and immediate business, declined to go, affirming that he would remain upon the doorsteps all day and all night until he *was* admitted. Martha, peering through the venetians, saw him in fact deliberately sit down upon the balustrade, and this alarmed her, for she did not know what construction the landlady might put upon such an act of pertinacity; so, with a very bad grace, at last she yielded.

As he entered the room, she was struck at once by his altered appearance.

‘Why, Charley, whatever can be the matter with you?’ she exclaimed, in a downright tone of surprise.

He simply advanced, and took her by the hand.

‘Oh Marty, Marty!’ he said, and his lips quivered, ‘what have I done to deserve it?’

Here was a total collapse and breakdown of his heroic intentions; and she, impressed for a moment by the firmness he had dis-

played at the door, took immediate advantage of it.

‘Don’t be lackadaisical, Charley,’ she said. ‘What is the matter?—are you ill?’

‘Ill!’ he repeated, ‘ill! and you can talk of it in that indifferent way? Oh, Marty, when I fought so hard for you at the bottom of the river, and was so happy, with every part in me frozen but my heart, to think that I had saved your dear life, it little occurred to me that I should live to see you treat me like this!’

She looked at him in amazement.

‘His head is turned!’ she thought; ‘he really believes what he says!’ Then she added, aloud: ‘Charley, I begged you once before not to mention that subject to me again.’

That struck fire from him at once.

‘Marty,’ said he, red to the very tips of his ears, ‘I won’t stand any more of this nonsense. It is wicked, it is cruel! You never, in your whole life, have known me to tell a lie. Why do you accuse me of such a thing now?—why do you ask for proofs where my word has always been sufficient? Proofs! I have none, of course. Dexter, whose soul was bought up cheap by the devil long ago,

he could testify, if he would ! Oh, Marty, if only the trees could speak !—if only the stones and weeds at the river's bottom had tongues !—you would be overwhelmed with shame and mortification for the way in which you have treated the best friend you have got in the world ! But give me a little time, that is all I ask for now, and if I don't prove to you that Dexter is a scoundrel—a paltry knave, who would steal the laces out of a man's boots, and pennies out of a poor-box, as soon as he would rob a man of his honour and a woman of her good name——'

Charley had gone too far. Martha turned very pale, and immediately hardened.

'You forget yourself,' she said, interrupting him ; 'you are speaking of a minister of the Church of England.'

'Which makes it a million times more disgraceful !' he answered bitterly ; 'the Church should spew out such a man as that, as the whale did Jonah—and not upon any comfortable dry land either !'

'Stop !' she exclaimed angrily, 'I won't hear another word said against Mr. Dexter.'

Charley sighed. He was getting discouraged.

'I know the reason why,' he said ; 'you

love the fellow, Marty, you know you do.'

'Well, if I do, I can't help it,' she answered, with burning cheeks and a badly simulated air of braggadocio.

'Oh dear, dear !' said Charley, fairly breaking down at last, 'it's very hard to hear this,' and, sinking into a chair, he buried his face in his hands.

'It's not my fault,' she answered, in a gentler tone ; 'I cannot love everybody, and there are plenty of nice girls left for you, Charley. I should make you a very poor wife, anyhow. I require to be ruled, to be held down by a firm hand.'

'Has Dexter a firm hand ?' asked Charley, looking up with a woe-begone smile through his tears.

'You, at all events,' said Martha, colouring again, 'are too good-natured and kind and generous. I'm not fit for such a husband as you would make. Really, Charley, I would give a great deal to make you happy if I could.'

'Oh, my darling, you can—you can !' said Charley, starting up from the chair. 'This thing is fast killing me, Marty. I know what is coming—I feel it more and more every

day. Do sweeten what of life there is left me! Don't let me go out of the world with this heavy burden upon me, when, with one little word, you could work such a miracle.'

'Nonsense, nonsense!' said Martha, with a feeble attempt at raillery, for Charley's manner was certainly impressive. 'You have got a bad cold—that is all; but don't you neglect it, and make a martyr of yourself, you stupid boy—that would be very wrong and foolish.'

'Don't talk in that way,' said he, earnestly. 'It sounds light and frivolous, and it grieves me to hear it. I only told you what I feel and truly believe. The world, Marty, has greatly changed to me within a week, and I am very miserable and wretched indeed. Poor old father has gone, and the home is broken up; the only relatives I have in the world kick me out, as though I was some mangy poodle-dog got into the wrong shop; and, to cap the very tip-top of the climax, the darlingest little girl in the whole universe goes right back on me, and says she loves a miserable shrimp of a minister, with as much composure as she would say at dinner-time: "Not any more potatoes, thank you, Mr. Smythe. I prefer sourkrout."'

'Oh! Oh! Oh!' and Martha came very near

laughing, in spite of the gravity of the situation.

‘Who *is* there left,’ he went on, ‘who cares whether I live or die? There are the boys over home, to be sure. Yes, the boys would be sorry, I know, to hear that Charley had been planted in a foreign grave-yard.’

‘Charley, Charley!’ she interposed, ‘don’t be so foolish!’ and her face began to wear a look of genuine concern.

‘I can’t help it,’ he went on, ‘I can’t help it. But I’m not going to be cross any more, or use any hard words. I came here in a passion, and I thought I should say some bitter things to you; but I can’t look in your dear face and do it. I only want to ask one favour—for your own sake, if not for mine; reconsider your determination to marry Dexter. You must excuse what I have said about him. I don’t always stop to select and pick my words, and some of them I suspect you couldn’t find in Dr. Watts’ hymns, or “Sandford and Merton;” but I always *do* speak out my honest convictions, and chief among *them* is, that Dexter is a bad man. Now, don’t take my word for it, but just wait and see—wait until you know him better; and perhaps something *may* turn

up to prove that you are now mistaken, and to restore me once more to your confidence.'

Martha hung her head a moment, then shook it sadly.

'It is too late,' she said. I believe in him. I have given my word. I cannot now draw back.'

Charley rose and extended his hand.

'Good-bye, then, Marty, good-bye! It will be useless for me to see you again; it will only add to my misery, which, God knows, is already more than I can bear. I am going away in great sorrow, Marty. There is a dreadful presentiment upon me, and I cannot shake it off. I wish you would listen to me. I'm not so foolish in all things as you imagine; and, Marty, remember what I say, you will want to come to stupid old Charley yet—I am sure of it. Don't be proud, little girl, and avoid me in your hour of trouble. Do what you will, and come what may, nothing, thank God, can ever prevent my being your friend. Good-bye, darling, good-bye!'

She stood speechless as he walked out of the room. Then she started forward, upon some sudden impulse, to detain him, but

stopped half-way to the door, and falling into a chair, burst into tears.

‘It’s too bad ! it’s wicked !’ she sobbed ;
‘but I can’t help it—I can’t help it.’

CHAPTER VI.

M. MIVART AGAIN.

CHARLEY, who had intentionally refrained, out of respect for Martha's feelings, from any mention of what he had learned at Mr. Palmer's, now directed his steps, with an aching heart, towards Lincoln's Inn Fields.

'I think I mentioned to you yesterday, Mr. Palmer,' he said, when he had taken a seat in the private office of the latter, 'that there is a little matter of a will I desire to have drawn up; and if you'd be good enough to take my instructions this morning—I can give them to you in a very few words—I shall be greatly obliged.'

Mr. Palmer immediately took out a sheet of paper from a drawer in his desk, dipped his pen in the inkstand, and said :

'Certainly, with pleasure, Mr. Smythe.'

'Well, then, to begin with,' continued

Charley, after a reflective pause, 'my father, who was a widower, died about seven months ago. You needn't put that down. I just merely mentioned the fact, that is all.'

'Very well,' said Mr. Palmer, laying down his pen.

'And as I came of age in July,' pursued Charley, 'and was his only heir, his property was handed over to me at that time by his executors, and consisted, after all bills and charges had been paid, and they were few in number, of a net sum of one hundred and eighty-eight thousand dollars in United States Five-Twenty bonds. He had sold the old homestead upon my mother's death, and various other real and personal property at different times, and invested the entire proceeds in these securities, which are now deposited, for safe keeping, with the Trenton Banking Co., with the exception of three one thousand dollar bonds, which I sold in order to purchase a bill of exchange on London. So that my property at the present moment consists of one hundred and eighty-five thousand dollars in bonds—what cash I have in bank here and in Trenton, and about eleven hundred pounds interest due on the first of next month. I am explicit upon this point,

Mr. Palmer, because if you have no objections, I should like to make you one of my executors.'

'Well, really,' Mr. Palmer began, when Charley interrupted him.

'Do you consent, sir?'

'Why, certainly, with pleasure; but——'

'Well, that is all right then, and you may take a memorandum of the sums I have named, if you will, so that, in case of anything sudden happening, you will thoroughly understand my affairs.'

When Mr. Palmer had done as he was commanded, he asked:

'And who, Mr. Smythe, is to be the remaining executor, for if I am not mistaken, you used the name in the plural sense?'

'Miss Summerfield, sir.'

'Ah! indeed!' and Mr. Palmer looked in surprise at the speaker for a moment, then wrote down the name. 'And now,' said he, looking up once more, 'the names of the legatees, if you please, Mr. Smythe.'

'Put down,' said Charley, earnestly, 'Martha Summerfield, sole legatee.'

An expression of genuine astonishment appeared in the lawyer's face as he threw

himself back in his seat and surveyed his client. 'Magnanimity is all very well,' he thought; 'but——' and he shrugged his shoulders.

'Without conditions of any sort?' he demanded.

Charley reflected. It was a great temptation.

'Yes,' he said at last, and rising from his chair, began to walk up and down the office.

'Is that all?' asked Mr. Palmer, when he had made a note of Charley's answer.

'That is all. Put it into good shape, and when it is ready I will sign it;' and Charley, suddenly averting his face, stopped by the window, and with eyes over which a film had gathered, looked out upon the close corporation of naked trees and shrubs in the square. Mr. Palmer paused, pen in hand, to look at him for an instant again, then he made a few additions to his memorandum, folded it carefully, docketed it, and placed it in a pigeon-hole in his desk. When he had done this, he fell into a meditative mood which lasted several minutes; then he spoke:

'Mr. Smythe,' said he, abruptly, 'will you kindly resume your chair?'

‘Certainly,’ said Charley; and when he was seated and had turned up a look of curiosity to the lawyer’s sober face, the latter continued :

‘My good fellow,’ said he, ‘you are in great trouble.’

‘I am, sir, in very great trouble indeed ;’ and Charley’s head fell upon his breast.

‘I was sure of it,’ returned Mr. Palmer, gravely, ‘and I’m sorry for it, upon my soul I am.’

‘Oh—well, what is the use !’ said Charley, with a sigh ; ‘man that is born of a woman, isn’t it, the Bible says ?—and there it is, you see. The sun doesn’t always shine, does it ? It must rain, and freeze, and blow sometimes, and there is a comfort, anyhow, in knowing that big ships go down as well as the little ones, and that there is no palace so grand into which the heart-ache does not now and then find its way.’

‘I am afraid,’ said Mr. Palmer, shaking his head, ‘that very little comfort could be got out of such philosophy as that. Have you seen Miss Summerfield since our interview yesterday ?’

‘Yes, I have just left her.’

‘Dear me ! and she still persists in her

infatuation, delusion, or whatever else you may call it ?’

Charley bit his lips, and was silent for a moment, then he took Martha’s letter from his pocket, and gave it to Mr. Palmer.

‘ You might as well know the whole story,’ he said. ‘ I don’t suppose you can help me, and, indeed, as she said herself this morning, it is too late now. I think she *did* feel sorry for me ; but it’s all up now, of course. Read it ! you are the only one I know of that I *can* show it to, and a fellow *must* unburden himself to somebody, you know.’

Mr. Palmer read the letter, and handed it back in silence.

‘ Well !’ said Charley, returning it to his pocket.

‘ My good fellow,’ said the lawyer, ‘ I’m dumbfounded.’

‘ You are ! and why ? I’ve always heard that women are just like that.’

‘ But you say she personally confirmed this—this—determination to you this morning.’

‘ She did.’

‘ Well, then, you have not far to go to discover the source of my surprise,’ said the lawyer, reaching forward and touching the

memorandum he had just prepared. 'Here it is, Mr. Smythe.'

'Oh! the will,' said Charley, colouring. 'Yes, of course—well! I don't know. Hang it! never mind! Every fellow has his notions, I suppose.'

Mr. Palmer, shrugging his shoulders, could not gainsay such an obvious fact; and, indeed, as he truthfully observed, it was his experience 'that the old doggerel about the birds and the men of many minds well deserves the conspicuous place it occupies in the copy-books of the young, sir.—Still,' he added, 'there is a limit even to generosity, my friend; and you must excuse me if, as your legal adviser, I ask what your motive is in taking this extraordinary step?'

'Motive—motive?' repeated Charley, his thoughts floundering hopelessly about, in the attempt to frame a suitable reply.

'Yes; you must have had some object in view, you know. For, if Miss Summerfield fulfils her matrimonial intentions——'

'Stop, stop!' said Charley. 'I see what you are driving at. You think that in case of any accident happening to me, Dexter might get possession of my property, don't you?'

‘Certainly.’

‘But he couldn’t, if he were *not* to marry Miss Summerfield, could he?’

‘Well, upon my word, you are talking, as the French say, *à tort et à travers* this morning.’

‘What does all that mean?’

‘It means that you are inconsistent, Mr. Smythe,’ said the lawyer, earnestly; ‘and that I am quite at a loss to comprehend your language—that is all.’

Charley became reflective again.

‘Well,’ said he, at last, drawing his chair closer, and lowering his voice, ‘the fact is this: you may think me superstitious, but, I have an idea that Miss Summerfield will marry neither Dexter nor myself.’

‘And why?’

‘In the first place, I shall not live long enough.’

‘Nonsense.’

‘That’s what she says; but let me ask you one question: In the course of a week, do you have more than twenty-two or three young fellows of my age bouncing in here to get their last will and testament prepared?’

‘Well, no; not exactly.’

‘Of course not; but if it were so, you

would suspect that there wasn't any great amount of health lying round loose in *that* crowd, wouldn't you ?'

'I should be strongly of that opinion ; yes.'

'Well, that's just my case. I know exactly what I am talking about. The good God above has sent for my book to be balanced, and it has got to be done. Now, please don't say a word. It will only make me feel badly, for you see I am resigned to it, and I don't wish to get dissatisfied, and whimper over what can't be helped. What worries me much more is, that I feel as sure as I sit in this chair that Marty is upon the brink of some great trouble. I've dreamed it by night, and I've felt the presentiment of it, heavy as a keg of nails, upon my heart by day. It never leaves me for a minute, it's there now.'

'What do you mean ? What is it ?' demanded Mr. Palmer, visibly affected by Charley's words, and nervously fingering a paper which he had, unperceived by the latter, taken from a drawer in the desk.

'I don't know,' said Charley, in a despondent tone ; 'that is the worst of it. If I was sure of *something*, however bad it might be, I should not feel it half so much ?'

Mr. Palmer partly unfolded the paper. Said he :

‘ You truly have no reason then for these disquieting impressions, beyond what you have mentioned ? ’

‘ Truly none. ’

‘ Because, ’ pursued Mr. Palmer, ‘ I have this morning received a communication from Paris, respecting some inquiries I last week set on foot over there, and which promise to have an important bearing upon Miss Summerfield’s future prospects. ’

Charley brightened at once, but before he could answer, the door opened, and Mr. Krinkle entered the office.

‘ Oh, you are engaged, I see, ’ he said, and was promptly retreating, when Mr. Palmer rose and extended his hand.

‘ Is it, ’ he asked, ‘ anything to do with the affair of yesterday ? If so, ’ he continued, as Mr. Krinkle glanced in the direction of Charley, ‘ you can speak with perfect freedom before this gentleman. Permit me, Mr. Smythe, to make you acquainted with Mr. Krinkle, who accompanied Miss Summerfield and myself to the bank yesterday. ’

Charley said he was glad to know Mr. Krinkle ; and the latter, when they were

seated, plunged at once *in medias res* by observing :

‘Since this gentleman is interested in this affair—I assume, sir, that you *are* interested in it?’

‘Of course,’ said Charley, nodding his head vigorously.

‘And are, therefore, familiar, I take it, with the result of our interview with Mr. Agio concerning the——’

‘The draft. Yes, I know.’

‘Well, then, I called upon Mr. Factor, as I told you I would, Palmer. I think I mentioned that he was an old friend of mine?’

‘Yes, you did. Go on.’

“‘Factor,” said I, “I want to get access to Hanway and Co.’s books. How can I do it?” He shook his head: “They are in the hands of the liquidators,” said he; “but what’s up now?”—“Forgery,” said I; “and if I can look into the matter quietly, so much the better, perhaps.” He thought so too, and made an appointment with me at the office of Sampson—you know Sampson—at ten this morning. On the way I dropped in at Agio’s, and got him to let one of his clerks go along with us with the draft. After

a good deal of palaver, and considerable persuasion on the part of Factor, the books were submitted to us, and the precious little bill was traced to the account of some miserable Frenchman, who had withdrawn nearly the entire amount, and whose address nobody seems to know. Here, I've got the name in my note-book, if it's any satisfaction to you to know it; I'm sure it's none whatever to me, as yet.'

Mr. Palmer assumed an air of unconcern, while exchanging a look of intelligence with Charley.

'A fine business this promises to be,' he said; 'but let us hear the name, while you are about it.'

'All right, here it is—Auguste Mivart.'

'Mivvert!' exclaimed Charley, excitedly; and he was about to say something which he afterwards would have been glad to recall, when Mr. Palmer trod upon his toe beneath the table, and brought him to a sudden standstill.

'Yes, do you know him then?' demanded Mr. Krinkle in some surprise.

'I was just trying to think,' said Charley, with a sense of being on dangerous ground. 'How is the name spelt?'

Mr. Krinkle spelled it.

‘Oh, no,’ returned Charley, with an air of strong conviction, ‘I knew a Mivvert in America, but his name was John—John Henry Mivvert. Excuse me for interrupting you.’

‘Have you looked in the directory?’ interposed Mr. Palmer, with a view of getting away from a mayhap awkward subject as quickly as possible.

‘Yes; and have made inquiries everywhere in the city—nobody knows, or ever heard of, the man.’

‘Umph!’ said Mr. Palmer reflectively. ‘It looks like a dubious case;—did you take a memorandum of the cheques drawn against the account? They might throw some light upon the subject, you know.’

‘Yes, oh yes, here it is. There are but four cheques—three payable to his own order, and the other to the order of L. Parker, whoever *he* may be, for I can find no trace of him either in the city:—as you say, Palmer, it looks like a dubious case,’ and Mr. Krinkle closed the note-book with a snap and replaced it in his pocket.

At this moment Mr. Soper’s face appeared at the doorway.

‘There is a lady and gentleman in your office, Mr. Krinkle,’ said he, ‘and they wish to see you immediately, if you are disengaged.’

‘Yes, yes; just so. I’ll be there at once,’ he answered, rising, and extending his hand to Charley. ‘Good morning, Mr. Smythe, these are important clients of mine, and I am obliged to leave you. Will see you later, Palmer,’ and with this, he bustled out of the room.

Mr. Palmer and Charley, surveyed each other a moment in silence, then said the latter :

‘Well, Mr. Smythe, you heard what he said. The thing is unravelling itself by degrees.’

‘I should think so,’ said Charley, with emphasis. ‘I always felt that Parker had something to do with it; but tell me, why did you tread on my foot when I spoke of Mivvert?’

‘I will tell you,’ said Mr. Palmer, gravely. ‘Mr. Krinkle, as you know, is Mrs. Warren’s solicitor, and I feared that Miss Summerfield’s interests might be endangered, were you to enlighten him as to Mr. Mivart’s whereabouts and identity, that is all.’

‘I do not understand you,’ said Charley, turning very pale.

‘You will very shortly, however, and you must prepare yourself for a great surprise. You prophesied, half-an-hour since, that Miss Summerfield was upon the eve of great trouble, but you could scarcely have imagined, I think, the source from which that trouble is to come.’

‘You frighten me, Mr. Palmer. Tell me, for God’s sake, if it’s anything very serious?’ whispered Charley, bending his blanched and earnest face over the lawyer’s desk.

‘Be quiet, my good fellow, don’t excite yourself. You shall know it all in a minute or two,’ and Mr. Palmer, having recourse once more to the communication he had received from Paris, opened it, and spread out the page with his hand. ‘Our friend, Miss Summerfield,’ he resumed, ‘has always been in doubt as to certain points in her family history. There is still an unexplained mystery in connection with Mr. Summerfield’s University career. There is an equal mystery, though one shortly to be solved, I hope, in the tie which manifestly existed between him and Mrs. Warren; and finally, her mother, up to the moment of her death, was tormented

by a secret, which I believe had been festering in her heart for years, and which partly transpired with her dying breath. "Pardon, my dearest child," said she—I have this from Miss Summerfield's own lips, remember—"Pardon, my dearest child—ten months before," and the rest of the secret froze upon the dead lips of the poor woman.'

'Well,' said Charley, 'I see nothing in that—ten months before what?'

'Her marriage, the daughter thought, but was not sure. Here was very little, as you say; but with this feeble clue I set to work. Something which had happened ten months before some other important event, marriage or otherwise, in her history, was obviously the key to the secret, and the source of all her misery. The difficulty, naturally, was to find out, in the absence of any certain data, what that something could be; and had she been an obscure woman, this would have been practically impossible. But, as it happens, she chanced to have been at one time well-known by name and reputation to the Parisian public as an actress at the *Gymnase Theatre*. This narrowed one part of the difficulty down to a simple inquiry at the theatre as to the date of *Mdlle. Louise Dessart's* engagement—

that was her name at the time—and the circumstances under which she quitted the stage.'

'Yes, yes, I see,' said Charley, eagerly.

'Well, it transpires, from evidence mostly furnished by yourself, Mr. Smythe, that a Frenchman, by the name of Mivart, was in the habit of calling upon Mrs. Summerfield in her husband's absence during the summer of 1861. It struck me, too, that in your interview with him, which by the way it may be shortly necessary to repeat—he asked some singular questions about Miss Summerfield. This, however, was all I could gather; and upon this slender basis, I sat down last Saturday and built up a formidable set of inquiries, which I sent to a clever friend of mine in Paris, with a request for detailed answers in every case. His reply is now before me—I shall give you the substance of it, and you can form your own conclusions as to the trouble in store for our charming friend.'

Charley was so excited by this time that he could only say :

'Yes, yes—go on.'

'Well, it would appear that Mdlle. Louise Dessart made her first appearance at the

Gymnase in the spring of the year 1845, in a play called "Un Fils de Famille." One of the oldest *attachés* of the theatre remembers her well, and recalls the important fact that, at this period, she was invariably attended by a handsome young fellow by the name of Mivart.'

'Good God!' exclaimed Charley, rising like a ghost from his chair; 'I know what is coming now.'

'Listen, listen! and let us get through with this business as quickly as possible. She played on until the spring of 1846, when she was absent from the stage for over two months. She was still attended by the man Mivart upon her return; but a few months later an Englishman took his place, and kept it until she definitively abandoned her profession in January, 1847, and disappeared from Paris. An examination of the official registers for the year 1846 furthermore clearly shows that, on the 2nd of March, a female child bearing the Christian name of Marthe was born at No. 92, Rue du Bac, its parents being respectively M. Auguste Mivart and Mademoiselle Louise Dessart. The most careful search, however, in the marriage registers of this period fails to reveal the name of either

of the above parties. That, Mr. Smythe, is the way the case stands at present, and in view of what Mr. Krinkle has just told us about the draft, you must admit that, in the interest of our friend, I trod on your foot to very good purpose.'

'You did—you were right; this thing, sir, must be kept from her at any cost,' said Charley, in a bewildered way. 'You don't know her as I do; you have no conception of what her pride is, and I am sure it will kill her.'

'We will do our best, Mr. Smythe; but you must remember that it may reach her through another, and, to us, unsuspected source. There is serious trouble ahead; this affair of the draft is bad enough, in all conscience, but it would be terrible, Mr. Smythe, if the father of our friend should prove to be a murderer.'

'That will do! that will do!' and Charley clasped his forehead with his hands. 'My head is all in a buzz,' said he; 'I must go out in the fresh air and try to think this out. I knew something was going to happen, but what *has* happened is very unexpected and very terrible. I will come back, perhaps, after awhile, but in any case, don't forget the

will. I am more anxious now about it than ever, so please attend to it at once.' And Charley, seizing his hat, quitted the office, and wandered off, he knew and cared not whither, through the busy humming streets, with a heart brimful of misery and bitter discouragement.

Meanwhile, Mr. Palmer had entered the outer office and said to Mr. Soper :

' Make an excuse to see Krinkle, and if you can pick up any stray scraps of conversation while you are in there, bring them back, and we will see if we can piece them into something intelligible.'

Mr. Soper speedily returned.

' Too late,' he said ; ' I met the lady and gentleman on the stairs ; but I overheard a few words of their talk. Said she : " Bring her to see me to-morrow afternoon, and I will then judge for myself. I don't want to know her name, or anything more about her, until then." That is all I could catch as they were passing. Can *you* make anything out of it, sir ?'

' It means that there is more trouble in store for our charming young friend,' said the lawyer, sighing ; ' that is all.'

A moment later Mr. Krinkle thrust his head in at the door and said :

‘I am getting out of the fog, Palmer. I know what that Parker cheque means, and I am afraid I know more than *you* would care to know about Monsieur Mivart. I’m off to Scotland Yard ;’ and he closed the door with a slam before Mr. Palmer could answer.

‘God help her now,’ thought the latter, as he prepared to make a draft of Charley’s will.

CHAPTER VII.

A THUNDERBOLT OUT OF A CLEAR SKY.

LATER on in the day, Martha called upon Mr. Palmer and learned so much of M. Mivart as related to his bank account at Messrs. Hanway and Co's. The essential point in the case, in Mr. Palmer's opinion, was that £40,000 had gone through that account like water through a sieve, and would never be recovered again. But when, turning aside for a moment from what to her were far more serious considerations, Martha suggested that the police had better be put upon the track of M. Mivart at once, the lawyer pooh-poohed the idea, and straightway confessed that the vital question, after all, of which too precipitate action might prevent an early solution, was the old question of Mr. Summerfield's disappearance; that Mivart was accessible in case of need, and would be approached in due

time in a manner not to excite his suspicions, and finally, that she might rest assured he would do all in his power to probe the perplexing business to the very bottom. This terminated the interview, and Martha left the office, dispirited, it is true, but all unconscious as yet of the impending storm; for Mr. Palmer had not only acted out of deference to Charley's wishes in withholding from her the intelligence he had imparted in confidence to him, but the good man was still so much in the dark himself, that he was gravely in doubt as to what his duty really was in the matter. Martha had a brief respite, in any case; and though the reflection that her father had miserably perished was poignant and terrible, far outweighing any money considerations—to which, indeed, except in so far as they related to her marriage, she had been ever profoundly indifferent—and though the frustration of her dearest hopes and the utter collapse of her deftly-laid schemes were galling to her vanity, and a stinging blow to her self-consciousness, there was still left her the one solace and comfort of Dexter's love.

This satisfaction was tempered, it is true, by an irrepressible sympathy for Charley Smythe; but, upon the whole, she felt in-

clined to be hopeful and happy. When one loves and is loved at twenty-one, it is easier to forget and forgive, and put aside dull care and sorrow, than it is when a few more lustrems have come and gone. So she got through with the day and evening with little or no sense of being otherwise than a young lady indebted to heaven for many blessings—chief among which was the love of a true and steadfast heart. But when she retired to her bed, and lay thinking during the small hours of the night, the case was far different. Charley's white face was ever sadly peeping at her through the bed-curtains; his rattling cough thrilled in her ears; his earnest entreaties and solemn warnings filled the air of her chamber. Even sleep brought with it a dull aching sense of misery and pain; grewsome, wraith-like shadows, prefiguring coming woes, flitted across her dreams; now heavy weights bore down upon her; again, yielding to a freak of levitation, she seemed to bound like thistle-down into an eternity of rosy æther, only to sink once more, like a dying breath, into utter darkness and a moment's oblivion; while throughout were audible low moans and sharp cries of distress, dwindling, when she stirred, to a mere drowsy hum, like that

of a sea-shell, and changing into the patter of rain-drops upon the window when she awoke and listened. Thus throughout the long night, until the cold, grey morning came with sounds of the world's awakening, and quiet sleep at last.

At nine was placed in her hands a long and gushing letter from Dexter, in answer to her note of acceptance, which concluded with a request that she would meet him upon the arrival of the three o'clock train at King's Cross that afternoon. Coupled with this was the desire that she should look as charming as possible, for a particular reason, which must remain a secret until he could disclose it to her in person.

Punctually at the time designated, therefore, she arrived at the station; and having bestowed unusual care upon her toilette, a very pretty sight she presented as she walked up and down the long platform, pending the belated train's arrival. So much so, indeed, that, in her self-absorption, she did not, for some time, perceive that she was heading quite a little procession of male admirers. Dexter, bursting at last from the slowly gliding carriage—too impatient, it would appear, to wait for it to stop—greeted her with

effusive warmth, and conducted her straightway to a cab.

‘I am going to take you to see a lady,’ he explained, when they were seated; ‘and you can never guess whom, I am sure: but try.’

‘The Queen?’ she submitted demurely.

‘Nonsense!’

‘Well, I thought I’d better begin at the top of the list. The two-headed nightingale, then?’

‘Worse and worse.’

‘Oh, pshaw! I give it up.’

‘Why, my mother,’ he answered, ‘whom, think of it, I never saw myself until a few days ago. I told her all about you, of course, and she expressed such a strong desire to meet you, that I agreed to bring the little girl to her to-day. You are not offended, are you, dear?’

‘Oh no.’ Martha was not at all offended, but she coloured very much, and asked him if Mrs. Dexter resided in London, and if they were going at once to her house.

‘She lives in the suburbs,’ said he; ‘but we are not going there. I have a bed and sitting-room at the Langham Hotel, where she agreed to meet us at half-past three.’

To Martha it was a novel sensation, this

of going to meet her prospective mother-in-law for the first time; so that when, a few minutes later, she mounted the steps of the great caravansary in Portland Place, she was in quite a flutter of pleasurable expectation.

‘No. 44, sir,’ said the clerk, looking up, in answer to Dexter’s inquiries, at a formidable array of pendant keys at his side. ‘No. 44. Oh yes: there’s a lady waiting for you in 44, sir—been here about half-an-hour, I should say.’

Dexter said, ‘Thanks, very much!’ and led the way up the stairs to the second floor. Soon No. 44, in brazen letters, stared them in the face.

‘Don’t be nervous,’ he said, with his hand upon the knob of the door. ‘You will like her, I am sure. You will be friends in a minute.’

Martha stood smiling, and with a burning face, one instant upon the threshold; then a terrible shock went through her body; her heart rose to her throat and fell heavy as lead again, and her blood shivered, icy-cold, to her finger-ends, as she saw a well-known figure in black rise from a chair and stand motionless in the centre of the apartment.

It was Mrs. Warren!

For a moment, Martha's stony lips would not lend themselves to speech; then, turning with eyes widened by astonishment and dismay to Dexter, she gasped:

'Is—is this lady your mother?'

'Of course she is; but what is the matter? Do you know each other? Mother, are you acquainted with this young lady?' and Dexter looked in helpless bewilderment from one to the other.

'We have met before; yes,' said Mrs. Warren. And the words were charged with a meaning which brought the blood back into Martha's face, and awoke all the old antagonism within her at once.

'We have,' she assented. 'I have cause to remember it.'

Mrs. Warren smiled, and shrugged her shoulders, as much as to say, 'I think so too;' then she turned to Dexter.

'This, I suppose,' she said, 'is the young person you propose to make your wife?'

Dexter, comprehending nothing as yet, beyond the fact that in some inscrutable way he had made 'a deuced fine mess of it,' stammered:

'Certainly, certainly; but,' he added, turn-

ing to Martha, 'what is the matter? what does it all mean?'

'It means——' commenced Mrs. Warren, when Martha interrupted her.

'It is *my* duty to speak,' she said; 'I have given Mr. Dexter a wrong impression. I told him about my father's disappearance, and how I believed he had fled from his home with a wicked woman. And this wicked woman,' she added, looking up at Dexter, 'I believed to be Mrs. Warren. I wrongly accused her of it, for which I am very sorry, and I have told her so.'

'Yes, it is true, she has; so let it pass,' said Mrs. Warren. 'It is, in any case, a trivial matter in comparison with what you are both now going to hear for the first time. You in particular, Miss—I was about to say Summerfield—but then, your name is *not* Summerfield.'

Martha, stung by the words, took a step forward.

'Mrs. Warren——' she began, in an excited manner, when her words were suddenly cut short.

'My name is *Mrs. Summerfield*, if you please, and I have been the wife of the man you speak of as your father for the last

twenty-three years. So do not call me Mrs. Warren any longer.'

Martha staggered back, as from a sudden blow which had benumbed and broken every faculty within her, except that of recollection. Into her soul again, like ill-omened birds rushing with a whirr of wings and a scream of victory to peck at her very heart-strings, came Charley's direful warnings. Her white lips opened and shut a moment without power of articulation, then she gasped :

'For the love of God, woman, what *do* you mean?'

'Sit down,' said Mrs. Warren. 'Sit down, both of you, for I have a history to relate.'

Martha sank mechanically into the nearest chair. Dexter, whose eyes began fairly to bulge from his head, followed her example.

Mrs. Warren went on :

'Legally speaking my name is not Warren at all. It used to be, so I have merely resumed the use of it. Why I have done so, you will learn presently. My father lived just out of Oxford. I was born there. He was the dearest and best man in the whole world, though, unfortunately, I did not realise the fact as soon as I should have done. He had two hobbies—the University, of which he

was *not* a graduate, and a suitable marriage for his daughter. The first caused him to fill his house with a good many objectionable young men. To catch a College Don, or a cadaverous double-first in green goggles, was the *great*, and as a rule unsuccessful, pursuit of his life. And the two hobbies combined led me into a life-time of trouble. This is how it came about. At seventeen I fell in love with a handsome young fellow of Brasenose—a Londoner, and a frequenter of our house, and the very reverse of the tuft-hunting, time-serving noodles who sputtered and cackled over my father's wine, and ogled me with their tipsy eyes; so, as a matter of course, we exchanged our vows in due season (or rather, I think, we forced the season), wrote sonnets to each other's eyebrows, apostrophised Charles' Wain and the evening star, caught sore throats with too much gaping up at the moon, and, in short, went through, as I presume you have been doing lately, the whole precious curriculum of love-making. Then came, of course, the usual verification of the old saw, and we found our affections tossing about upon troubled waters. My father interposed at a critical moment, having had a certain blar-eyed, hawk-nosed, buck-

toothed baronet put aside for me, it appeared, ever since I quitted my nurse's arms. Down came the paternal edict like a sledge-hammer. Colder vows would have gone to pieces at once ; but our affections, being at white-heat, only welded beneath the blow. So that one fine morning I found myself secretly married, and under the necessity of concealing from the world the fact that I had become Mrs. Charles Summerfield.'

Here she paused, and took a small packet from her pocket. From this, after carefully looking it over, she extracted a bit of yellow parchment, and handed it to Martha.

'That,' said she, 'is my marriage certificate, Examine it carefully. Assertions without proofs—you know what has been said of them :

“ Dict sans faict
A Dieu déplait.”

And I believe it. It is my purpose to corroborate in this fashion every statement I am about to make. Have you satisfied yourself fully ?”

Martha handed it back without a word. She seemed to be in a kind of stupor, or mental asphyxia. Her thoughts had suddenly become leaden, and would not, as yet, rise

to a full realisation of the blow she had received.

‘This pleasant state of things, however,’ continued Mrs. Summerfield, ‘did not endure for long. The sweetest milk *will* sour, and I think I *have* heard of palates being cloyed with over much sugar. We quarrelled within a week. Then discovery came, and a terrible scene occurred between Mr. Summerfield and my father, who died the same night of heart disease. This was bad enough in all conscience, but, as the novelists say, the worst was yet to come. My brother, whom you have met’ (and, as she said this, she looked hard at Martha), ‘and who always was a whole-souled, chivalrous fellow, came up from London to attend the funeral; and in the course of a very earnest conversation, remonstrated warmly with both Mr. Summerfield and myself for our imprudent conduct in contracting a secret marriage. The result was, that in a sudden *emportement*—to borrow another expression—my husband, who had a very bad temper in those days, assaulted him in such a furious manner that he was picked up for dead at my feet. His skull, striking against the mantel-piece in the *mêlée*, had been fractured. Trepanning saved

his life, but his mental faculties suffered a permanent derangement from the shock. He has been under my care ever since. As for my husband, he was compelled to fly upon the very day on which otherwise he would have taken his degree. He went, I believe, to France. I never saw him again until I met him by accident in America fifteen years afterwards. I waited seven years for his return, and then petitioned the Courts for a judicial separation, and obtained it. This, she added, extending another document, 'officially confirms the fact.'

'Very well,' she continued, as Martha motioned it away with her hand. 'It will be at your disposition whenever you feel inclined to see it. It only remains for me to add,' and she opened another paper, 'that, in the course of the year a son was born to me, who was duly baptised under the name of Thomas Dexter Summerfield. This is the gentleman!' and she pointed at the bewildered clergyman. 'It was a whim of mine, and not a very motherly one, I confess, to keep him in ignorance of his parentage until he should come of age. Even a knowledge of his true name I successfully withheld until recently. I watched over him from a distance, supplied

him with means, provided for his education, and purchased in his name the advowson of a very comfortable living. So much for *you*, my son. And now I must approach a very unpleasant topic, and sweep away, with as gentle a hand as possible, a number of delusions from this young lady's mind.'

Martha looked up, in helpless misery.

'Be quick!—be quick!' said she; 'I cannot stand much more of this.'

'Well, to be brief, you perceive, of course, that I have never ceased to be Mr. Summerfield's lawful wife; and that, setting aside any question of his having committed bigamy in marrying your mother, your illegitimacy and inability to assume his name would be incontestable in any case.'

'Perhaps,' faltered Martha, 'he procured a divorce in America.'

'No,' said Mrs. Warren, producing the last of her documents, 'if you care to read this, it is a letter of Mr. Summerfield's, written at my request in Perth Amboy, and contains a solemn assurance that the lady with whom he then lived was bound to him by no stronger ties than affection.'

'And then,' said Martha, with a gasp—partly rising in her chair and fixing a look of

horror upon Dexter, '*I am his — his sister !*'

'You are no relation,' said Mrs. Summerfield emphatically ; 'and this letter will show you that you were a baby when Mr. Summerfield first met your mother in France.'

When the burden of that sudden and terrible doubt was thus rolled off her heart, Martha laughed hysterically a moment, then sank back in her chair, looking so corpse-like that Dexter hurriedly rose and rang for a glass of wine. This revived her. Straightening herself up, she endeavoured to harden every faculty, and face the ordeal bravely.

'Who am I ?' she demanded ; 'and for heaven's sake show me a little mercy if you can.'

'Your father's name, I believe, was Mivart ; and assuming that he was married to your mother, I will call you Miss Mivart.'

Martha shuddered, and covered her face with her hands. She felt the smarting tears beneath her aching eyeballs, but they would not flow and mitigate the agony of this terrible awakening.

'I will say nothing now,' Mrs. Summerfield went on, 'of the coincidence which connects the name of Mivart with the forged draft.'

Let us trust that it is a coincidence, and nothing more. But it must have already struck you, I think, that, unless you can produce a will of Mr. Summerfield's in your favour or your mother's, the property into which you have come in possession belongs in reality (subject, of course, to my right as widow) to this gentleman;' and she designated the more and more astonished Dexter with a gesture. 'Of course,' she went on, 'you will take advice upon the subject, and examine into and verify the documents I have shown you this afternoon, and which I shall be very glad to submit to your solicitor. But you will find that the end, in any case, will be the same. I have no personal feeling against you, Miss Mivart, for I feel that you are truly to be pitied. Nor do I wish to be unnecessarily harsh in the matter of a restitution; and I may safely affirm, I think, that my son will agree to your retaining, say——'

'Not a penny!—not a penny! if it does not belong to me,' said Martha, in a firmer tone; 'I have a profession, thank God, and can earn my living!'

'Well, well—we shall see! And now, as to the object of your visit here to-day. My son, he informs me, has proposed to you and

been accepted ; and you are here to learn if I approve the wisdom of such a step. Please, don't say a word, Miss Mivart, until I am through, and then, if you are of the same mind still as regards my son, I shall waive every question as to birth and property raised by me this afternoon, and give an unqualified consent to your union. I have said harsh things to you, Miss Mivart, in the interest of the truth. I had not the framing of your destiny, and am responsible for none of the troubles which have befallen you. Upon me devolved the duty of enlightening you as to your true position in the world, and I have fulfilled it conscientiously. I am through. It is now the turn of my son,' and she fixed a look upon Dexter which he found to be decidedly uncomfortable. 'I have made inquiries,' she went on, still steadily regarding him ; 'and find that, when he sought your hand, he was practically engaged to be married to Miss Cadmus, of Limeborough. I also learn that this act of disloyalty was mainly prompted by a feeling of pique against an old admirer of yours, by the name of Smythe—who, by the way, as you will shortly learn, has ten thousand times more claim upon your affections than this young

gentleman has. He performed for you an heroic deed. Stop; do not speak, my son. I dislike falsehoods, and you are about to utter one.'

Dexter, who was very red and confused, took a sidelong glance at Martha, and was fairly terrified by the look in the poor girl's face.

'You had, the other day, a very narrow escape from death?' resumed Mrs. Summerfield, turning again to Martha.

'Yes, yes—I had!' whispered the latter, bending eagerly forward in her chair.

'Well, there is one, just one, very deplorable feature about the affair. You have wasted all your gratitude upon the *wrong man*.'

Martha was too horror-stricken to answer; she could only look in helpless bewilderment at the speaker as the latter went on:

'Yes, Miss Mivart, the wrong man. It was Mr. Smythe who rendered you that splendid service. It was he who dragged you out of the river at the risk of his own life, and then was cheated of his reward. While *he*, half frozen and drenched to the skin, ran to get you some brandy, this honest young gentleman here, arriving by mere accident

upon the scene, promptly carried you off, and accepted thanks another had so gallantly earned. It was a bold stroke, this of yours, to win a woman's heart,' she added, transfixing Dexter with a look; 'but, under the circumstances, it was a despicable and dirty piece of business, and the only suitable reparation you can make for the grief you have wantonly inflicted upon a brave and noble young fellow is to confess at once to Miss Mivart that you, a minister of the Gospel, crept into her heart under false pretences. Do not hesitate or prevaricate. Speak! and tell her so at once.'

'Somebody must have seen me, after all,' thought Dexter, and he hung his head in shame. 'It is true,' he said; 'but I——'

Martha rose and stretched her hand toward him, while she averted her face.

'Don't speak!' she cried, 'don't speak! Oh my God! I'm going mad! take me away! Let me go!' and she staggered toward the door.

He was at her side in a minute.

'Martha!' he said.

But she pushed him away with a gesture of disgust.

'Don't touch me!' she said. 'You shall

have the money. Oh my God!—yes, you shall have it all. Stand aside, I say, and let me go.'

She groped her way down the stairs like one in utter darkness, and gained the street she hardly knew how. People turned and looked at her as she passed. 'In trouble,' said the benevolent. 'Too much fizz,' said one roistering youth, promptly dogging her footsteps, with recruits at *his* heels, as she hurried on, and was caught in the great human wave which roars and surges about Regent's Circus. Rude jostling brought her to her senses for a moment. She looked up, saw where she was, perceived her followers, and dispersed them with a look, then turned her ghastly face homeward, and once more hastened on.

CHAPTER VIII.

IN WHICH JOHN BROPHY ASSERTS HIMSELF TO
SOME PURPOSE.

ONE of the results of Charley's interview with Mr. Palmer, was that he resolved to have as little as possible to do with his promised visit to Deadwick. Accordingly, he wrote to Mrs. Warren to say that he would meet her at King's Cross on the following morning at ten o'clock, and would accompany her as far as Limeborough, but that on no account would he agree to contribute, by his presence, to Mr. Brophy's discomfiture. 'He is a good fellow,' said he in conclusion, 'and if he *is* to receive a blow, I don't want to be present when it comes. If Parker alone were concerned, I wouldn't care, but it's quite a different case with the old man. He took my part against that beast of a minister I told you about, so you must see yourself that it would be *con-*

temptible in me to turn on him in such a way.'

When he had posted this, Charley fell into a ruminative mood, which ended in his seeking the nearest telegraph office and forwarding a despatch to Mrs. Brophy. 'If Mivart's story be true,' he said to himself, 'Mr. Policeman will probably gobble up one of Marty's relations, and that must *not* be.' So the matter resolving itself simply into a question of personal service to Martha, it befell, later in the day, that Lydia Brophy received from C. S., London, a telegram that puzzled her not a little, but which she wisely refrained from showing to her lord and master.

Punctually at the time appointed, Charley arrived at King's Cross the following day, and was joined by Mrs. Summerfield, who made, upon the journey, an ineffectual attempt to dissuade him from the purpose he had announced to her in his letter of the preceding day. Her retaliation for this took the form of an account of what occurred at the Langham Hotel, and was so terrible in its effect upon Charley, that she at once experienced a remorseful sense of having done him a wanton injury. Accordingly, she sought to mitigate his pain by relating the story of Dexter's con-

fession, and venturing to prophesy for him a realisation of the hopes he had confided to her in their initial interview at Oak Lodge. Charley's heart kindled at these words, and he thanked her in his most earnest manner for her friendly and successful intervention, which caused Mrs. Summerfield to say that, far from entertaining any personal ill-will toward Miss Mivart, she was disposed to insist upon that young lady's retaining the sum of £4000 from the amount she would be legally obliged to surrender, and which would constitute, in her opinion, a by no means despicable marriage portion.

At this point in the conversation the train stopped at the Limeborough Station, and Charley, more determined than ever to adhere to his resolution, busied himself at once in obtaining a carriage for Mrs. Summerfield. Having done this, and given minute instructions to the driver as to the whereabouts of the Deadwick brewery, he exacted from her a promise that she would not mention his agency in the matter to Mr. Brophy, and then, after shaking hands, walked in great perturbation and distress of mind to the Dolphin and Magpie.

About this time Mr. John Brophy was

sitting astride his office-stool, with arms akimbo, an invoice before him, and his brain in a perfect swelter over a long column of figures which persistently refused to be 'totted up' in a satisfactory manner. It was his firm conviction that he was on the track of an error which, if not hunted down, would result in the loss of a certain indefinite number of pounds sterling to his own pocket. He had twenty times painfully toiled up that frightful zig-zag of figures, and twenty times he had achieved a different result. This was perplexing, and brought out the perspiration at every pore, but it only confirmed his previous opinion that he *had* been robbed, and, as the amount seemed to vary from one to forty pounds, he resolved to take one more arduous journey to the top of the page. He was half way up, when a knock came at the door—the latch turned, and a lady entered the office, whose appearance caused John to leap at once from his stool, remove his hat, and look in dismay at a bucket of bran-mash standing upon his best chair, and at other items of a general disorder.

'Are *you* Mr. Brophy?' said she, in a tone which John felt to be so very objectionable, that his solicitude for the appearance of the office ceased at once.

‘Ay!’ he answered, ‘I’m pretty well-known hereabouts by that name, I believe.’

‘Yes, well—your wife’s name, if I’m not mistaken,’ she went on, ‘was Lydia Parker, and you may have heard her speak of Mrs. Warren. I am Mrs. Warren.’

‘Oh! ay! o’ course,’ said John, wagging his head. ‘*I’ve* heard on you—bless you; you’re the missis’s cousin—bean’t you?’

‘The *what*?’

‘Cousin.’

‘Did *she* tell you so?’

‘Ay! a many times.’

Mrs. Warren laughed.

‘Why,’ said she, ‘Parker was my maid, and I discharged her for robbing my jewel box. In doing that I made a great mistake. I should have sent her to prison. That would have been an act of charity to you, my friend.’

Had the end of all things, then, really come, and were the stars pelting down like hail-stones upon a world in the throes of dissolution, that such things concerning his ‘missis’ could be uttered in the doughty brewer’s presence? John listened in amazement; and a spasm went through his capacious chest as he listened. His missis in prison?

and his face waxed purple with congested wrath.

‘Look ’ee here,’ he exclaimed, ‘it mayhap hasn’t come to your mind, Mrs. Warren, that you’re a saying hard things again’ my wife :— you’re a very grand lady, an’ you talk big an’ fine—I won’t dispute it wi’ you ; but you’ll agree wi’ me, p’r’aps, that if ’t *is* poor and shabby, the property’s my own, an’ I’ve a right to say, standing right here, an’ not afraid to look you in the face nayther, that I won’t have nothing said again’ my missis under *this* roof, and you must na’ forget, either, that she *is* my missis.’

‘Don’t lose your temper, Mr. Brophy, for you will need it all very soon. Where is your missis, as you call her ? I want to see her.’

‘At t’house,’ said John doggedly ; ‘an’ happen there be *two* Mrs. Warrens i’ the world, she might na’ care to see the wrong ’un, don’t you see !’

‘Which is the Stubbleshire way, I suppose, of telling a lady that she is a——’

Mrs. Warren, whose temper was igniting, paused a moment, and added :

‘That she is a prevaricator. But I have no quarrel with you, Mr. Brophy, and I will

candidly admit that the object of my visit is to induce Mrs. Brophy to show *both* of us what she has concealed in that black box of hers.'

John started. Her words were like a cold douche upon the fires of his resentment, and the recollection of the sleep-walking scene he had witnessed in his bed chamber came back to him again with a force that whitened his lips and made his stout limbs tremble.

'Box!' he repeated.

'Yes,' she answered, perceiving his perturbation. 'Perhaps, though, *you* can tell me what it contains?'

'I would na' deny,' said John, 'that there's a box i' the spare chamber upo' which the missis sets great store; an' I will na' deny that I've had a spell o' curiosity now an' then to see't wi' the lid open; but you may believe me, or you needn't, it's a' the same to me, but upo' my word—an' that's reckoned worth summat in these parts—I could no more say what's in't, than I could tell you how many blades o' grass there be in a ten acre field.'

'Well, shall we go and see? I have come all the way from London to gratify *my* curiosity in the matter. We can do the thing quietly and pleasantly ourselves, which, I am

sure, would be a much better way than to have the Limeborough police come down with a search-warrant to examine your premises, wouldn't it ?'

John stood aghast, with drooping jaw, and stared at her.

'Yes,' she continued, 'it is quite as serious as that, and you should be grateful to me for not resorting to extreme measures at once. I have a carriage waiting outside ; will you enter it with me and tell the coachman where to drive ?'

'Do you mean to tell me,' said John, 'that there's that i' the box as she didn't come by *honest* ?'

'Well, you come and ask *her* that question, and judge for yourself.'

'I will,' said John, putting on his hat and leading the way to the door. He entered the carriage, and maintained a dogged silence until he stood in Mrs. Brophy's presence.

'This is Mrs. Warren,' said he then, 'an' she tells me, Lyddy, that you were her maid, an' no relation at all, an' that you robbed her jewel box an' were discharged from her service. Is it all true ? for I've told her as I canna believe it.'

When Mrs. Brophy first entered the room

and recognised her visitor, the purport of the mysterious despatch she had received flashed upon her mind in an instant. She knew too well the woman with whom she had to deal, not to see that prevarication was entirely out of the question. Furthermore, the instinct of self-preservation was thoroughly aroused within her, and as is the case in all moments of crisis, minor considerations of policy were swept at once from her mind. Fifteen minutes earlier, had John ventured upon such a question, he would have been blown to atoms in the inevitable explosion of an injured wife's feelings. So indifferent was she now, however, to her liege's opinion, that she turned to him with a greenish white face and said :

‘There was a misunderstanding between Mrs. Warren and myself in regard to some missing jewels, which I hope she has since recovered. It is quite true, what she says about my having been in her service. I will say, too, that it was a very pleasant service, and I wish I could have continued in it instead of getting married.’

This was so unexpected that John was obliged to take a seat and mop his perspiring forehead with his handkerchief, while he

looked, in a bewildered way, first at Lydia and then at Mrs. Warren.

‘Well,’ said he at last, to the latter, ‘the breath’s nearly took out o’ me, ma’am, I won’t deny it; but wi’ what little there’s left I must ask your pardon for doubtin’ your word. Eh! upon my soul, it’s a dangerous business i’ this world to lose the temper, for one seems most times to be i’ the wrong, an’ it’s a puzzling thing a’togither to get at the rights o’ things i’ these days.’

Before Mrs. Warren, who, to tell the truth, recalled Charley’s words and looked very kindly at John, could answer, Mrs. Brophy interposed with :

‘Will you be good enough to excuse me *one* moment. I have some instructions to give my servant, and I will return immediately.’

Her fingers were already on the door-knob, when John rose, and in three strides reached her; as his hand fell heavily upon her arm, she looked up with her eyes in a white heat and said : ‘Well!’

He drew her aside from the door, and stood with his back against it himself.

‘Lyddy, there’s summat wrong i’ the house,’ said he huskily; ‘what is it?’

‘I don’t know what you mean, you fool!—
Come away from the door.’

He looked at her a moment in silence;
then he said :

‘Where were you going, then?’

‘To the kitchen, I told you.’

‘But the box is not i’ the kitchen, Lyddy.’

‘The box!’ she repeated, looking up at
Mrs. Warren and assuming an air of sur-
prise.

‘Yes,’ said the latter, speaking for the first
time, and in a peremptory tone, ‘the black
box upon which your husband says you set
such great store. I wish to see its contents.’

‘John,’ said Mrs. Brophy, suddenly burst-
ing into tears, ‘what does she mean? and
why do you permit people to come into your
own house and pry into the affairs of your
wife? It’s cruel, hard-hearted wickedness in
you to do it;’ and she fell sobbing into a
chair. ‘I never thought that it would come
to this,’ she went on, ‘I really didn’t. *You*,
who have always been so kind, to turn upon
me in this way, and believe me to be a thief,
or something worse.’

‘Come, now,’ said John, in a gentler tone,
‘you must na’ talk i’ that way. I donna’
wish to believe wrong o’ you, Lyddy; but

the quickest way to put yourself i' the right, you know, is to up an' show the box to the lady.'

'I won't,' said Mrs. Brophy, curtly.

'Very well,' said Mrs. Warren, approaching the door; 'I suppose, then, that I must return to Limeborough, and obtain the services of a policeman. I *was* in hopes, Mr. Brophy, to spare you that humiliation.'

'Stop,' said John, 'I brought you to t'house to see the box, an' I'm danged if you don't see't, too. Come, Lyddy!'

Mrs. Brophy remained motionless upon her chair.

'Come now, or I'll *make* you come; an' you would na' like that before strangers,' and John's brow knitted, and great knotted veins started out of his forehead.

'Well, as you please,' she answered once more, rising from her seat; 'but as I feel ill and upset, I suppose you won't begrudge me a drop of brandy. You may go on; I will join you in a minute or two.'

This seemed a reasonable enough request; so John led the way up the stairs, and into the spare bed-chamber, where he pointed out the box to Mrs. Warren. In the meantime, Lydia, instead of having recourse to the

brandy-bottle when she entered the dining-room, immediately turned the key in the lock and transferred certain papers from beneath the carpet to a place in her bosom. Then she hurried breathlessly up the stairs and entered the bed-chamber.

‘Oh, here ye be!—eh?’ said John, in a tone of impatience. ‘Now then, the key.’

Lydia threw herself into a chair, and maintained a sullen silence.

‘D’ye hear?’ he repeated, ‘where’s the key?’

‘I don’t know anything about it,’ she answered; ‘I have no key.’

‘Look’ee here now! Don’t ’ee trifle wi’ me, Lyddy! ’Tis na’ often I use my rights an’ say ye *mun* do a thing; but I’m domned if I ain’t a-going to do’t now. Open the box.’

In lieu of an answer she rose from her chair, crossed the room, deliberately seated herself upon the box, and glared defiance at them both.

‘For the last time now, will ’ee do as thou’t bid?—yes or no?’ demanded John, in a louder tone.

‘NO!’ and she clenched the lid with both hands and ground her teeth.

This was a little too much for John. ‘Bide

you here,' he said to Mrs. Warren, 'I'll na' be a minute,' and he left the room. When he returned, he had an axe in his hand, which he leaned against the wall. Then, without a word, he lifted the rebellious Lydia, as he would a child, from her coign of vantage, and carried her, despite her frantic struggles, to the other end of the chamber, and plumped her in a chair.

'Now sit 'ee still,' he said, 'I'm maister here to-day; an' I don't want to hear another whimper until I'm through with this here job.'

Whereupon he returned, seized the axe, whirled it over his head, and then crash went the lid of the box into a hundred splinters.

'Now,' said he, turning to Mrs. Warren, 'what is it *you* want? Be quick! I'm in no temper for any fooling to-day.'

Mrs. Warren's black eyes were immediately bent over the shattered lid, and, peering into the interior of the box, her eager look quickly changed into one of astonishment.

'Empty it out upon the floor!' she said.

John did so at once; and a bundle of letters, some fragments of lace, an old annual, a 'Friendship's Token,' a daguerrotype or

two, and a moth-eaten moire-antique rolled upon the carpet. Further tilting and shaking revealed nothing more.

Mrs. Warren was bewildered and perplexed by this unexpected *dénouement*, until, looking up, she saw an exultant gleam in Mrs. Brophy's white eyes, and a grim smile upon her bloodless lips, when she realised that she had been 'done' by the cunning Lydia. This exasperated her.

'You cat!' she exclaimed; 'you sly, deceitful creature!'

But Mrs. Brophy only smiled the more, and said:

'Now, John dear, you see what a fool you have made of yourself. You are satisfied at last, I hope, and I suppose we can *now* dispense with Mrs. Warren's company?'

'Well,' said John, turning to the latter, 'you hear! Is there any more boxes or furnitur you'd like bu'sted open? Let's finish it, if there be; an' if not, you're bound to confess, I take it, that 'tis a poor business, comin' to a honest man's house an' accusin' his missis o' things as you canna' prove.'

Mrs. Warren bit her lips and was silent a moment; then her face suddenly brightened, and she turned sharply upon Mrs. Brophy:

‘Who is Mr. Mivart?’

This was a Parthian shot. Lydia’s smile changed into a ghastly smirk, and then died out upon her white and parted lips altogether.

‘Never mind,’ continued Mrs. Warren, ‘that is a question which concerns your husband more than it does me;’ then, turning quickly to John, she added :

‘I have made no false accusations, my good man, as you will confess to me before I am through. She has deceived us both, to-day ; but her triumph won’t be for long. Now, I want to ask you a question in her presence. Does she ever walk in her sleep?’

John hung his head in silence.

‘*Does* she?’ repeated Mrs. Warren.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘I canna’ deny that I’ve seen her do a many queer things in her sleep.’

‘Did you ever know her to go to this box in her sleep?’

He hesitated, and looked over to Mrs. Brophy, who sat white and rigid in her chair, like a corpse. And while he still hesitated, he saw the rigid figure start up, with outstretched arms, and fall, with a stifled cry, to the floor.

Half an hour later, Mrs. Warren said to John, at the garden gate :

‘The greater part of the stolen money is, I believe, on deposit at the Bank of England. I feel very sorry for you, my good man ; but then, you must remember, I have my rights as well as you have yours. I have now told you all I know about the matter. This Mivart may or may not be a relative of hers ; but that they conspired to rob my husband I have not the slightest doubt. Your tenant came out here in search of evidence, and obtained it in the manner I have described to you. You must not blame her, poor girl. It would have been far better for her if she had displayed greater frankness at the beginning ; but she has, at least, done both of us a great service, Mr. Brophy, in exposing this wickedness. If, however, you should still feel in doubt, meet me at the Bank at twelve to-morrow—will you ?—and we will investigate the matter together. That, I am sure, is fair enough. I will agree not to commence proceedings until you are fully satisfied as to your wife’s guilt ; and indeed, should the money be refunded, I am not sure but that, for *your* sake, I would let the matter drop entirely. So be on hand punctually at twelve.’

And, as John assented to the proposition, Mrs. Warren re-entered her carriage, and was driving rapidly toward Limeborough, when something very unexpected happened by the way.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GULF DEEPENS.

MARTHA never exactly knew how she reached her lodgings after the interview at the Langham Hotel. Her first tangible recollection was of waking as from a trance, to find herself reeling with a giddy faintness, and falling prone upon her couch with a loud cry for water. The afternoon was long and dreary enough, but the night was simply horrible. To sleep was impossible. Whatever is diabolic in our mental processes thrives best in utter darkness. Conscience is the night-bird of the soul. Hope begins to blink with the sun's setting, and is up again with the lark. Hence the beneficence of summer nights, perhaps, to leaden-hearted mortals. Martha felt, as the most of us do at some poignant moment in our lives, that to die then and there would be a comfort and

a relief worth praying to the good God for. And she did pray long and earnestly that she might drain the bitter cup that night and be at rest. But such prayers are never answered. And so, hour by hour, the worm-wood and the gall of her affliction worked deeper in her heart, until no sweet or tender thing in it was left untouched. All her gorgeous air-castles had collapsed and gone to pieces; old landmarks had disappeared; moorings were cut loose; her very identity was become a matter of conjecture; thus far in the world she had been living under the falsest of pretences. The pleasant, sunny past was a tempest-swept desolation. Over the future, hitherto so green and full of promise, a blight had fallen. It was not even a Canaan as seen from Pisgah now, but a Promised Land, seared by frost and obliterated in ice and snow, whence a bleak wind blew, in which her very soul shivered.

Hardest of all, at her feet lay a broken idol—a poor tawdry image, tricked out in tinsel and gew-gaws of a sentiment as flimsy as the clay of which the false god was made. And she had worshipped at the feet of this wretched simular, and had rebuked the indignant iconoclasm of a hero, whose sole

object in life had been to make her happy!

Ah! the terrible prescience of that faithful friend and lover, doomed, like all Cassandras, to laden the wind with unheeded warnings. Had she but listened in time! In him was the true knightliness, untarnished by a single stain, and the love that the grave quenches for the one black hour, indeed, which precedes the dawn of God's eternity, and then, as some of us believe, lives on for ever and ever. She saw it all now. Echoes to which she had steadfastly refused to listen came beating through her memory. Up upon a loftier pedestal than that upon which Dexter had stood she elevated him—the devoted friend and the true lover, who had been so magnanimous and forbearing, where another's heart and patience would have surely failed them. And looking closely and critically into her heart, she found what she had for the past few days vaguely suspected—that it was in truth a palimpsest, in which all the old writing had been fully restored. But alas! of what avail was this discovery now? Had she not told Charley herself that it was 'too late?' He would surely despise her were she to make overtures toward a reconciliation, for which she would,

she thinks, willingly sell her soul. If she were rich she might, and, indeed, would humble herself to him—for that would be but just, and a proper expiation to make for her folly. But she was rich in nothing now but her self-respect, and that poor offering would surely be misunderstood, and attributed to motives which no human being should ever impute to her. Oh God! it was hard! And her heart cried out against the bitterness of her fate. She must leave England, of course. Everything must be surrendered—her beloved pictures, the *bric-à-brac*, every piece of which was a sunny memory of some old world ramble; and she sobbed at the thought. All must go. In a few days she would be at work again in the galleries of Paris.

And she had toiled and spun then for this? This was the flower crown for which she had so ardently striven? The man she had loved and revered from a child was not even her father. And as the image of the dark and mysterious stranger she had encountered upon the Deadwick meadows uprose in her mind, her soul fairly sickened and revolted against her kinship with what she too well knew would shortly bear the brand of infamy.

But, pshaw! it must be a dream. She

would wake presently, and find the sun streaming in at the window and dissipating the black humours which had fallen like unwholesome mists of the night upon her soul. She would hear her canary sing, and the church bells ringing a reminder of coming wedding-chimes.

No, there could be no doubt about it. She was wide enough awake. And as she sat up in bed, she could see through the open door a dim flicker in the sitting-room grate, and a splash of yellow light—which she knew came from the street-lamp across the way—lying upon the window curtains. A cab rattled past. The French clock upon the mantel-piece struck three.

‘Only three o’clock!’ she said, in a despondent tone. Then she rose, replenished the sitting-room fire, took a drink from the water-bottle, and at last pressed her face against the frosty window-panes and peered down into the silent street. Suddenly a blind in a house across the way flamed up in scarlet an instant, then went out like a spark again. Five, ten, fifteen minutes passed, and the black outer world gave no further tokens of its existence.

Then she crept back into her bed, and burying her face in her pillow, sobbed for an

hour as if her heart would break. It was a great relief, however. A compressed emotion pains and maddens, whereas it may trickle entirely away in tears—a truth upon which the changes have been often and very properly rung. So that Martha came very near falling asleep at last; but the French clock, tinkling its four strokes of the hour, proved in its small tinkling way to be an effectual Nemesis, and she lay thenceforward with wide staring eyes until the cold and haggard dawn came and dulled the saffron light upon the window curtains. Whereupon, she rose again and replenished the fire. A rime lay upon the windows, and, as she shortly perceived, upon the holly bushes and laurestinus in the front garden. Looking down the street, she saw the line of upper windows shine like burnished tin as they caught oblique gleams from the kindling east. As for the gas lamp opposite, with its tongue of dirty flame, it had already become a solecism in the mantling whiteness of the morning.

Martha was glad. She could bear her burden now with a more cheerful heart; for to people in soul distress, the day conveys a sense of companionship which disappears with the gloaming. Even when night is *en grande*

tenuë, with the white moon blazing on its forehead, and all the orders of deity glittering upon its breast, even then it is a ghastly and unwelcome sight to the conscience-stricken and the heart weary of its burden.

Martha's canary began to chirp and peck at the husks of yesterday's hemp-seed. The windows in the street took on a hue of burnished copper, and by the time Martha was dressed, a stream of cold sunshine was pouring into the bed-chambers of her opposite neighbours.

When the servant came to make the fire, she was frightened to find Martha, white as a wraith, with reddened eye-lids, and purple stains beneath them, sitting with her feet on the fender, and her attention absorbed, as it would appear, in the roaring grate.

When she had had her breakfast, she took a long walk, and recovered some of her colour. Afterward, she called upon a dealer in pictures and *bric-à-brac*, with whom she was well acquainted, and astonished him very much by asking him to prepare, without delay, an inventory and valuation of the contents of her rooms.

She then took a cab and drove to Lincoln's Inn Fields, where, without any prelude what-

ever, she related to Mr. Palmer, with a single exception, all that had occurred on the previous day. She concluded by expressing it as her wish that the documents in Mrs. Summerfield's possession should be examined without delay, with a view to the immediate restitution of her property to Mr. Dexter, in case his claim to the same were thereby legally established.

‘I have already examined them,’ said Mr. Palmer, gently. ‘The lady and her son were here yesterday afternoon, and the papers were submitted to my inspection. I shall verify them by an examination of the official registers, but I am afraid——’ and here Mr. Palmer lowered his voice, ‘greatly afraid, my dear young friend, that your claim to the property would be successfully contested.’

‘Well, then, that is all about it. I will leave the matter entirely in your hands, and I think you had better communicate with my guardian at once. He will be greatly surprised and distressed, poor man;’ and Martha's lips quivered; ‘but,’ she added, gulping down her rising tears, ‘there is no use in temporizing with what is inevitable; pains that are quick and sharp are the best, after all. Close the whole thing up at once, Mr. Palmer—the

sooner the better—and as for your remuneration, I have a small sum of money of my own——’

‘Stop! I beg of you!’ said the lawyer, earnestly. ‘Your interests, and not mine, are for the moment at stake, and that being so, I will say that Mrs.—er—Warren, is by no means indisposed to be unduly harsh or illiberal. She even agrees—and I must confess that under the circumstances I was surprised at it—even agrees——’

‘To let me retain some of the property, I suppose,’ interrupted Martha.

‘The sum of £4000—yes.’

‘Well, then, as I told her yesterday, I will not accept a penny of it unless it can be proved to be legitimately my own, and *that*, you assure me, is impossible. To about £800, however, I am legally entitled, I suppose, since it was the property of my mother; to that much only will I make any claim.’

Her answer revealed a phase of human nature so utterly foreign to anything in Mr. Palmer’s previous experience of the world, that he looked at her in simple consternation.

‘What!’ he exclaimed, ‘you really mean——’

‘That I wouldn’t accept a penny from the

man who has stepped into my shoes, and taken the name I have always borne, if it were to save my body from starvation or my soul from perdition. *That* is what I mean. Listen, and I will tell you why,' and Martha related the concluding episode of the interview at the Langham Hotel.

'The cowardly puppy,' said Mr. Palmer, red with honest indignation, quickly adding :

'Well, at all events, Mrs.—er—Warren deserves some credit for making him confess. We must admit that much, at least.'

'Does she? I'm sorry I cannot agree with you. Where could she have found a more effectual means of breaking up my misplaced attachment for her son?'

Mr. Palmer was silent a moment.

'That is true,' said he, 'very true. But, I'm heartily glad for Mr. Smythe's sake that the thing has occurred. He, poor fellow, cannot fail to be happier now.'

All of the early morning pallor returned at once to Martha's face.

'Do you know Mr. Smythe, then?' she demanded, in a faltering voice.

'Why, yes;,' he answered, slightly colouring. 'He has become a client of mine, and

—and, of course, has made more or less of a confidant of me.’

Martha looked at him a moment with parted lips ; then she said :

‘It’s quite true ; I’ve wronged him very much ; but I’d rather not talk any more about that to-day ; and, indeed, if you have nothing more to communicate, Mr. Palmer, I think I will go now. I have a great deal to attend to,’ she added, rising, ‘and I purpose running out to Deadwick to-morrow, to close up my affairs there, and remove my effects. I should like, too, to be in Paris by the middle of next week, so that I shall require all my time, as you must perceive.’ Whereupon she extended her hand to Mr. Palmer, and was about to say ‘good-bye,’ when he motioned her to be reseated.

‘I have much to say,’ he answered, in a tone of such excessive gravity that Martha, trembling with a vague apprehension of some new and impending trouble, sank without a word into her chair again, and looked up at him in helpless bewilderment.

‘I have received,’ he went on, ‘a somewhat startling letter from——’

Martha started up with parted lips.

‘Oh ! Mr. Palmer,’ she cried, ‘I cannot

bear much more. Is it some fresh affliction ?

The lawyer stretched forth his hand, and laid it gently upon her arm.

‘My dear young lady, it is best that you should hear what I am about to say. It will not deepen your misery. The end has come, and you are brave and strong enough, I know, to listen ; and when it is all over, I feel that a heavy burden will roll away from your heart.’

Martha, turning ghastly pale, and tearing open her cloak as she fell back with a succession of gasps in her chair, so alarmed Mr. Palmer, that he seized upon the water-jug and sprinkled her face ; then he poured out a glass of wine, and forced it through her bloodless lips.

‘Poor child ! Poor child !’ he unconsciously said ; and when the colour returned to her cheeks, he added, in a tone of downright concern :

‘Let it go for to-day ; come again when you are a little stronger. I had no idea, really. Upon my word, it *is* too bad !’

Martha conjured up a smile and said :

‘Please give me another glass of wine, Mr. Palmer.’

When she had drunk this, she added :

‘I think I can understand, now, why men become drunkards. I feel ever so much better, and want you to tell me everything. As I said, I shall be out of town to-morrow, and I do not know when you will have a better opportunity. Go on—go on! You have received a letter—from whom?’

Mr. Palmer hesitated a moment longer; then he said:

‘From your guardian—but before I communicate to you its contents, I must have done, once and for all, with another matter, with which, under the circumstances, I feel it to be my unpleasant duty to make you acquainted. Did you ever learn the date of your birth from your mother?’

‘Yes,’ she answered faintly, ‘it was the 2nd of March, 1846.’

‘You thought, I believe, that Arles was your native town.’

‘I understood so, but I may have been mistaken, and have confounded it with the place of my mother’s birth.’

‘You *were* mistaken,’ said the lawyer, opening a drawer in his desk and producing a paper, which he slowly unfolded and presented her with.

‘That,’ said he, ‘is copied from the official

register of births of the city of Paris, and I think there can be no question as to the identity of the parties concerned.'

Martha read it through and handed it back.

'You may keep it if you wish,' he said.

She shook her head, and as he replaced it in the drawer she asked :

'Was search made for a marriage certificate as well, Mr. Palmer ?'

The imploring look, the pale face bent so far over the desk that he could feel the warm breath upon his cheek, the low tones of a voice made tremulous by agony and suspense, made such an impression upon the usually unimpressible man of the law, that he would have given his cheque for a hundred pounds, upon the spot, to be able to say a comforting yes to her question. But this could not be. Again he hesitated before he answered :

'Search *was* made.'

'And was it found? Oh, sir, was it found?'

Her looks were too much for him.

'It hasn't been yet,' he said; 'but then, doubtless——'

'Yes,' she interposed, with a ghastly smile, 'I know; there may be an error in the

record—a clerical error, don't you call it? And until the entry is found I, of course, am simply Martha Dessart. Oh yes; I understand. Now go on. What does my guardian say in his letter?'

'Are you strong enough?——' he commenced, when a shiver went through Martha's body.

'Give me some more wine,' she said. 'I *must* hear it; and you must not think ill of me. It's strength I want, no matter from whence it comes. Thanks. Now be quick with it.'

Mr. Palmer took up a letter from the desk, and stood an instant, as a surgeon might, scalpel in hand, over a patient to whom, as he knows, the pangs of suspense are keener than the pain he is about to inflict. Then, slowly unfolding the communication, he began:

'This concerns your fa— that is—er—I mean Mr. Summerfield. D—n it! You must excuse me, but it *is* a shame, and he *was* a father to you too!' And Mr. Palmer turned red as a turkey-cock, and nearly choked with indignation. Then, perceiving symptoms of hysterics upon Martha's part, he hastily added:

‘Well, well; never mind. It appears by your guardian’s letter, and a newspaper cutting which he encloses, that an old fisherman recently died at Perth Amboy who made a somewhat startling confession before leaving the world. His tale was this: One day in the summer of the first year of your Civil War, he was rowing through the Arthur Kull, I think it is called?’

‘Yes, yes.’

‘And was overtaken by a certain storm, which we both know a great deal about. So, being a prudent man, he ran his boat upon the Staten Island shore, at a point—let me see—“where an indented bluff, crowned with firs and hemlocks, incloses a triangular strip of shingle in such a way as to render it inaccessible except by water, and which, therefore, is not visited twice a year by any human being.” This is the somewhat minute description of the place given by the *Perth Amboy Herald*. Well, it appears that he had no sooner pulled up and secured his craft than it began to blow great guns, and another boat came bolting in from behind the bluff, whose occupant leaped out upon the sand and joined him. He, it appears, was a stranger in Perth Amboy, and the fisherman, who then helped

beach his boat, describes him as a foreigner, with a black moustache and imperial, speaking English with a slight accent, and very agreeable in his manners.'

'M. Mivart,' said Martha, in a whisper.

'It is to be feared so; yes. However, while the two were screening themselves from the force of the hurricane, a yacht suddenly shot into sight beyond the edge of the rock, staggered an instant as the gale struck it, keeled over, and floundered, a mass of soaked and sodden sails (the description and the alliteration are not my own), in the boiling water. At the same instant they both saw a man struggling in the waves. He was at least half-a-mile from the shore, and about in mid-channel; and as the tide was fortunately at an ebb, had he been a good swimmer, he might have easily gained the land; but it appears he got entangled with the rigging, and was drawn under the water with every lurch the craft made in the wind. Well, the spectacle of a man drowning before your eyes is a terrible one. I saw it once myself from the pier at Brighton, in a storm, and shall never forget it. So the two men on the shingle resolved at once to rescue him if possible. They took the lightest of the

two yawls, and made a desperate spurt into the teeth of the wind and the rain, which (I quote again) "came drenching down upon them by the hogsheadful." Indeed, to do them full justice, they worked with desperation to reach the capsized craft, which by this time had drifted, dragging the poor man with it, nearly a quarter of a mile down the channel. When they got quite near, they discovered, it appears, that the mast had become unshipped or broken, and that the man in the water had cut away so much of the rigging that, as they approached, the yacht suddenly righted, revealing the hatchway battened down, and the man clinging one instant to the tiller-ropes, and then disappearing from view. This was the critical moment, and I have much pleasure in saying that the foreigner M. Mivart, who chanced to be an excellent swimmer, immediately plunged after him, but, unfortunately, without success. He tried again with no better result. In the meantime, what was left of the yacht had floated off to a considerable distance, and as they were about to give it up as a bad job, the drowning man rose to the surface about twenty yards from their boat. They flew to the oars, pulled with all their might, and

reached the spot as he sank, when Mivart once more took a header into the water, and was this time rewarded by success. But the man, when they dragged him into the boat, was insensible. So, the fisherman taking the oars and heading for the sheltered spot they had left, Mivart turned the man upon his face, filled his nostrils with snuff, rolled him alternately on his side and face, slapped his body, and, as it would seem, in the absence of any dry or warm clothes, did all that lay in his power to resuscitate him; but it was of no avail. The experiment was repeated upon the beach, but the man was quite dead.'

Martha's brain was in a perfect tumult of emotions. The vivid picture of the drowning man recalled her own narrow escape, and, for an instant, prompted a regret that she had not perished like him. Then came a sense of thankfulness that, however black the remaining pages of the history might be, her father had heroically striven to save the father of her love and recollection from the fate which had so embittered her life.

'I am not ashamed of him thus far,' she said, while a tinge of colour for the first time appeared in her cheeks. 'Whatever his life

may have been, he strove bravely and manfully to save the man whose loss I have so long mourned. That is not everything, I know ; but it is a great deal. Go on ; I feel stronger now. The worst has passed. A horrible dread has not been realised : I anticipate the rest. It is theft, Mr. Palmer, but, thank God, it is not murder. My heart is much lighter. Go on—go on !

‘ Well,’ resumed Mr. Palmer, ‘ I must confess that a great weight was removed from my *own* mind this morning when I received your guardian’s letter ; for I feared, as you did, something far worse. Still, what remains to be told is bad enough, in all conscience. It transpires, from the fisherman’s confession, that a consultation over the body resulted in an agreement, which was carried out to the letter. The fisherman was in great pecuniary straits. The Frenchman found upon the body a document, of the purport of which the fisherman, as he could not read, was unable to give the slightest idea. There were about four hundred dollars, a gold watch and chain, and a diamond ring upon the body, however, which the impecunious fisherman was urged to appropriate, the document appearing to satisfy the mild cupidity of the Frenchman ;

the result being that, after diligent search, a horizontal cleft was found in the rock, at a distance of about twelve feet from the shore, in which the body, minus the valuables I have mentioned, was placed, and covered with sand and gravel. It was agreed that the Frenchman should disappear the following day, and he stuck to his word. I have reasons for believing that he crossed the Atlantic upon the steamer which bore Mrs. Warren, her brother, and the charming Lydia to these shores; but never mind about that now. This was the fisherman's story. The authorities of Perth Amboy were duly informed of the matter, and instituted immediate search in the spot indicated. The result was, that human remains were found there, together with incontestable evidence of their identity, in the shape of a bunch of keys, recognised by two of your former servants, and a number of teeth filled with gold, which it appears a dentist of New Brunswick was able to identify at once.'

'Yes, yes—that might be so,' said Martha, with a sigh. 'There was, I remember, something peculiar about them.'

'Well, that is about all. An inquest was held upon the remains, and a verdict of acci-

dental death returned. Some speculation, it appears, was indulged in, as to the nature of the document taken by the foreigner; but it quickly died out, I suppose; the truth of the matter being known only to your guardian and Mr. Summerfield's solicitor. It only remains for me to say that I am instructed to break the intelligence to you as gently as possible, (which I have striven to do), and to endeavour, *in your interest*, to trace the missing draft, and discover the whereabouts of the mysterious foreigner—which it is needless for me to say I will no longer trouble myself anything about. So we have, at last, the mystery solved; and there, my dear young friend, the matter rests. It does my heart good to see you go through the ordeal so bravely; and though, being a practical man myself, I cannot conceive of your having any romantic feeling for this new found parent of yours, I shall, for your sake, exert myself to the utmost to save him from the consequences of his crime.'

At this point Mr. Palmer, having an engagement at twelve, looked at his watch, and found that it wanted but five minutes to that hour; so he brought the interview to an end by saying:

‘If I were you—this is an old bachelor’s advice, and may be good for nothing in your opinion—but if *I* were you, I should write to that very excellent young fellow, Smythe, and thank him for dragging me out of the river.’

‘I will do it,’ said Martha, colouring.

‘I would also ask him to come up and see me,’ continued the lawyer archly, ‘to talk over our differences and misunderstandings, and try to come to an agreement satisfactory to both of us.’

‘Which I can *never* do,’ rejoined Martha, with a deepening colour. ‘I shall be ashamed ever to meet him again.’

And the lawyer, descending the stairs with her, endeavoured in vain to dissuade her from this determination.

CHAPTER X.

CHARLEY HAS HIS REVENGE.

UPON his arrival at the Dolphin and Magpie, Charley Smythe was duly informed that double sixes and a five thrown in his name by the barmaid the night before, had resulted in his becoming the possessor of a dozen silver table spoons, as many forks, and a soup-ladle bearing the indisputable hall-mark, and weighing we should not like to say how many ounces. This unexpected piece of good luck cheered him amazingly.

‘Jove!’ he said, ‘the wind is changing;’ and he straightway treated everybody upon the premises. ‘It’s a pity,’ he explained, ‘if a man with a pocket full of spoons *wouldn’t* stand drinks all round.’

Then he whispered to the barmaid:

‘There! I don’t want the d——d things. I’ll lend ’em to your mother—I told you so

before; what made you trot 'em out, before the whole company ?'

Then, as she protested in the most *undetermined* fashion, saying, 'Oh no, no, no; oh no, no, no!' he added :

'Well, I'll tell you what I will do, I will *sell* them to you.'

The barmaid's falling jaw kept up the refrain of 'No, no, no,' as plainly as could be, whereat Charley laughed and added :

'As cheap as dirt—for just a little slip of paper with an address upon it.'

She blushed, adjusted her back curls, gave one quick glance around the room and another oblique one at a mirror, that made a multiplication table of the bottle-rack at her side.

'Well,' she commenced, when Charley interposed with :

'That is, of course, if you *can* give it to me. Though I suppose,' he continued, heedless of the arch look in her eyes, 'if you didn't chance to know it yourself, some of these chaps here would be apt to, don't you think ?'

Wounded vanity had to do with the falling jaw this time. An effusive smile puckered into a mere button-hole was his answer.

'Well !' he said, observing these phenomena

with some surprise, 'it's the address of a minister I want to obtain ; but perhaps you are like me, and haven't much acquaintance in that line.'

Oh yes, but she had, and the blighted smile restored, and a delusion—bright as a soap bubble and as evanescent—pricked, the question of spoons came to the fore again.

Charley, clinking them upon the counter, said :

'Dexter is his name—a young fellow with a sprig of whiskers, and very white about the gills.'

'Oh yes—who saved a lady's life the other day—certainly.'

'That's the man,' said Charley, tightening up his features ; 'where does he live ? Give me his address, and the spoons are yours. If I find him at home, I'll come back and treat all Limeborough, and—what is it they do over here when a man is glad, and generally pleased with himself?—build a drinking fountain, isn't it ? Well ! I'll do that—I'm darned if I won't !' and Charley brought his fist down upon the counter, and glanced round the room in a way which a bibulous old mute, fresh from a very solemn funeral, interpreted into a second invitation to drinks.

Said he huskily :

‘Thank ’ee, maister ; the chill o’ the carpse is a gotten i’ my bones this marnin’, I fear, an’ I’ll na refuse ye.’

Whereupon Charley regained his good humour, paid for a second round of drinks, obtained the desired address, and stepped into the street.

The first man he ran against was Dr. Colfax. The old rose-garden Lothario stood stock still with amazement.

‘Good God ! my dear boy !’ he exclaimed, ‘what are you doing here ? You have the consumption—do you know it ?’

‘Been in the family for years ; tell me something newer than that, doctor, if you please ;’ and Charley, guilty of a falsehood, the wicked fellow ! laughed in a way that the doctor clearly did not approve, for he shook his head gravely and said :

‘Don’t make a jest of it ; you should be in your bed to-day. Are you living in London now ?’

‘Yes.’

The doctor took a memorandum book from his pocket.

‘What is your address ?’

‘490, Great Russell Street. I engaged

lodgings there last evening ;' which was perfectly true.

' With a kind motherly sort of person, eh?'

' She looks like it—yes ; and has got three sons and a daughter in America, whom she inquired after as soon as she found I was a Yankee. *She* will freeze to me, I think.'

' I am glad of that. You are going back to-night, of course, unless——' and the doctor brightened up, ' unless you and Mr. Cadmus have settled your differences amicably?'

' Oh ! not at all. I wrote an apology, and he has never even acknowledged it.'

' Pshaw ! confound it ! Cadmus doesn't usually act in this way !' muttered the doctor. Then he turned savagely upon Charley : ' Well, then,' said he, ' what the deuce *brings* you here to-day?'

Charley held up the slip of paper containing Dexter's address.

' Fox-hunting,' said he. ' I am going to have the reverend animal's brush.'

' He ! he ! haw !' commenced the doctor, when he caught a sight of Charley's burning cheeks, and promptly suffocated his mirth in a red silk handkerchief.

‘Hum! hum! this won’t do. Go back by the next train, that is a good fellow, and I will run up and see you to-morrow. To tell the truth, I have sold my Limeborough practice, and intend to enjoy my *otium cum dig.* in London. I found a man, who being obliged to go to Australia, had a little villa and six hundred rose-trees in the Finchley Road for sale. Thought I to myself, the old fool ought to be encouraged for planting roses instead of cabbages; so I bought him out at his own price, and intend to play the step-father to all those blushing creatures. Consequently I shall be able to run round to Great Russell Street, and look after your case. You need the hypo-phosphites, by the way. Come here into Taraxacum’s, and I’ll have something made up for you. Then take my advice: let Dexter go to the devil, and get into the first train for London, and keep quiet.’

Charley laughed, entered the chemist’s, obtained the prescription, said he would think over the doctor’s suggestion, and walked straight to 42, Sunnyside Terrace.

Mr. Dexter was *not* in, in spite of Charley’s shilling, but it was believed that he would dine at Mr. Cadmus’ that evening. This was

perplexing, and Charley walked disconsolately about the Limeborough streets for more than an hour, when he suddenly met a small boy with a pair of skates under his arm.

‘Hallo, Johnny!’ said he; ‘where are you going?’

The young Briton, resenting the familiarity, stopped and looked Charley deliberately over from head to foot.

‘Find out,’ said he, at last, turning on his heel and walking away.

‘Well!’ exclaimed the astonished Charley, ‘I really thought it was against the law for explosives to lie around loose over here. That boy will blow up his own father and mother before he dies. Hallo! what is this?’

He was in front of an ironmonger’s shop, and dangling from every coign of vantage in the windows were skates, whose steel runners shone bravely in the afternoon sun, and fairly dazzled the eyes of the young Yankee.

He entered at once, and learned that the Ooze was tight as a drum, and safe as a turnpike road. The skin of ice *had* been pricked. Yes; oh yes; but with an axe—which accounted for the accident to the young lady the week before. ‘A wonderful swimmer,’

the ironmonger thought, 'that Mr. Dexter must be;' and instantly collapsed as Charley looked up, and said:

'Oh yes, he's a h— of a fellow, that Dexter; can dive like a pound of lead. Here, I'll take this pair;' and tucking the irons under his arm, he left the scandalised tradesman—who was a churchwarden, and unaccustomed at least to the sound of irreverent words—and set out in quest of the Ooze.

Upon the way he reflected.

'It's my duty to see Lottie, and show her this letter,' he thought. 'It may be a mean thing to do. No! hanged if it is! I'll do it.'

And turning up the Acacia Road, he stopped at The Elms, and rang the bell. Briggs came to the door, and stood a moment, glowing with pleasure, the most supremely happy man at that moment in Limeborough, excepting the honest ironmonger, perhaps, who had charged Mr. Smythe an extra five shillings for his skates, upon the same principle that *forestieri*, in the ante-deluvian days some of us know of, used to be mulcted in the sum of five pauls for a *visto d'entrare* into triple-crowned Rome. So that a shocked

ironmonger *may* have his consolations, after all.

‘Bless us and save us!’ said Briggs; ‘the sight of you would cure a cataract, it would; but demmit, sir, you’re a looking ill; you’re as white as white ’Ave a glass of port, sir. The master’s gone up to London, and Miss Lottie’s gone a skatin’ with the parson, as you—— He, he, he. You *must* excuse me, sir; but come in a minute, do—as you (closing the door)—Lord! it *was* a good joke; if ’eed a gone to the dyers he couldn’t a been redder; and just out of the wat, and his little whiskers a tricklin’ like cut weins. It just *was* a caution and no mistake. ’Ere, sir, that’s the master’s best port;’ and Briggs extended a glass.

‘No,’ said Charley; ‘I’m not one of that sort of fellows. Your heart’s all right, old man, but your head is off the level. Uncle pays for that port, and not you. Here is something for your New Year. I think I remembered your Christmas?’

‘Lord bless you, sir.’

‘Well, that is all right. Miss Lottie is on the river, I suppose?’

‘Oh yes, sir.’

‘I’ll go down there, then, and see her. Good-bye, old man.’

And Charley started off upon a trot for the Ooze.

Melting snow, stiffened by midnight frosts, had jagged and honey-combed the greater part of the river's surface. But Dexter and Lottie had found a spot, swept as clean as a floor by the wind, near the Deadwick Bridge—a lustreless expanse, dulled into a zinc gray by frozen air-cells, and stretching a good two hundred yards from a sharp bend in the river to the bridge itself.

The low banks on either side were covered with a scurf of dirty snow. The unkempt pollards held up their frozen arms to the white sun; gusts of wind fell, stinging like whips, upon Lottie's face, and kept the hot blood tingling there in a manner distracting to see. At least, so thought Dexter, who had begun by wondering what he could have seen in Martha to admire, and ended, after a brief reflection, by admitting to himself that he had never been in love with her at all—which was the truth; the reverend gentleman being too much in love with Mr. Dexter ever to lose his heart in that direction. It was the same, too, so far as Lottie was concerned. He had a prodigious liking for—her figure;

and had been delicate enough to mention the fact to a few esoteric friends. There was something about her instep, too, that he particularly admired, and when, being a novice in the art of skating, she fell a number of times upon the ice—the intermittent display of trim ankles was very gratifying to him indeed. All of which, taken in conjunction with the prospective plumpness of her marriage portion, led him to believe not only that he had over-rated Martha's beauty, but that she herself was a bit of an impostor, who in strict justice should be compelled to pay back interest upon the money she had been making such unlawful use of. He found a compensation, too, in this aspect of the case, for the wound his vanity had received at Martha's hands on the previous day. He could afford, under the circumstances, to be jilted, even in that summary fashion, and forgive it, too, as he had in the most public manner forgiven that young savage, Charley Smythe, whom, however, he trusted would never cross his path again. So, in traversing the meadows this afternoon he had told Lottie all about his altered name and fortunes, prefacing the same with a beautifully worded exordium upon the inscrutable ways of Divine Providence. She was de-

lighted ; upon perceiving which he popped the question into her ear before they had been an hour upon the ice. He had been on the point of doing so twenty times before, and she knew it. So, when it came at last, it was all the better for the keeping. They were skating arm-in-arm toward the bridge, and against the wind, which caused her to bury her face in her furs.

‘Did you really not care for *her*, then ?’ she demanded, without raising her eyes.

‘This Martha, whatever her name is ?’

‘Yes.’

‘Pooh ! not I. I *did* have a good deal of respect for her, but I have lost even that now, for, don’t you see, it’s very strange about that money business.’

At this moment they both heard the rapid click-clack of steel behind them ; and before they could turn, a figure flew by like the wind, and making a circular sweep in their path, came and touched Lottie on the arm.

It was Charley Smythe.

‘Lottie, I want to speak to you,’ he said ; and there was such a strange look in his face, that she started back in alarm, and could only exclaim :

‘Why, Charley ! what *is* the matter ?’

‘I have a word to say to you, that is all. Briggs told me you were on the river.’

Dexter disengaged his arm from hers, and was moving away, when Charley, looking at him for the first time, said :

‘Stay where you are, Mr. Summerfield. What I have to say concerns you, and it is not my habit to talk about people behind their backs.’

Dexter whitened in an instant, bit his lips, and exchanged a look with Lottie.

‘You know my name, it would appear?’ he answered.

‘Unfortunately, yes.’

‘Why unfortunately?’

‘Because it’s a name I have always respected, until now.’

‘Am I to receive fresh insults from you, then, sir?’

‘Probably you will call them so, though why the devil should feel insulted when he is called black, I cannot see.’

‘Oh, Charley, please, please don’t quarrel!’ said Lottie, stepping between them; ‘and if you have anything to say to me, let me hear it at once.’

All three being compelled to step aside, to avoid a threatened collision with a small boy,

who came thundering down upon them with clanking irons and outstretched arms, wildly clawing at the air, Lottie suggested that they should stand in the shelter of one of the abutments of the bridge, which they accordingly did.

‘Now, what is it?’ she repeated, ‘and remember, no quarrelling; there is a lady present.’

‘I make and accept no conditions,’ said Charley, quickly, ‘since I am in a chronic state of quarrel with this man:—I hope he won’t trifle with me, that is all.’

Dexter’s lips turned fairly blue.

‘One would think I stood in fear of you,’ he said.

‘I *have* seen you in that condition, and you might have a relapse—you can’t always tell, you know. Now, Lottie,’ he went on, ‘I suppose he has told you all about this wonderful wind-fall of his.’

‘Yes, he has; and what of it?’

‘And has been making love to you again, I’ll swear?’

‘Impertinent puppy!’ exclaimed Dexter.

‘See here!’ said Charley, ‘that’s a waste of ammunition: a fox never yet offended a watch-dog by calling him a puppy.’

‘Charley Smythe,’ interposed Lottie warmly, ‘I believe you are tipsy again. Is this all you have to say to me?’

‘Will you answer my question?’

‘No,’ she answered curtly.

‘Well, at all events,’ said Charley, taking a letter from his pocket, and placing it in her hands, ‘he has been making love with a vengeance to somebody *else*! Read that, and see!’

Lottie, flaming red with jealousy and suspicion in a moment, looked hard at Dexter, and his eyes fell. The devil clearly was roused in the woman. She tore open the envelope, and read, in Martha’s handwriting, which was unfamiliar to her :

‘5, Sebastopol Terrace,

‘Bayswater, W.

‘MY DEAR CHARLEY,

‘I think it best to write at once, and tell you that I am engaged to be married to Mr. Dexter * * *’

She read thus far, glanced at the signature, and, without even turning to look at him, extended the letter to Dexter.

To Charley’s amazement, Dexter, who had feared the case was much more desperate—

that, in short, his eyes would fall upon damaging confessions in his *own* handwriting—now laughed outright, and returned the letter to Lottie.

‘What have I to do with it? It is some game of that adventuress, I suppose?’

Charley was thrilled to the heart with the man’s audacity :

‘What!’ he cried—‘you deny it?’

‘Every word of it—yes!’

Lottie now transfixed her cousin with a look.

‘You hear what he says?’ she said.

‘Oh yes, I hear! and when I get my breath again, I’ll tell him he’s a liar.’

Charley was indeed stupefied. All the stars in heaven seemed to be spinning around his head for a moment. Had Marty deceived him after all? and the thought sped like a knife into his heart. Then his common sense, pointing to Dexter’s pale face of the moment before, and recalling to his mind Mrs. Warren’s words in the train, he straightway said to himself, ‘I am a fool, he thought it was one of his own letters—now I shall catch him in his own trap!’ And turning with the deliberation which is based on a strong conviction to Dexter, he said :

‘When I give my promise to a lady, I always keep it. I have got my breath again, you audacious humbug, and now I say that you are a liar!’

Lottie, fearing a collision, thrust herself between them at once.

‘Prove it,’ she said, ‘or he will surely strike you, Charley.’

‘That’s good!—haw, haw, haw!’ and Mr. Smythe laughed so loud that the thundering small boy, passing at the time, turned to listen, with such disastrous results to himself that he came down with a whack—feet twinkling a moment in the air; then was up again like a hero, and clanked through the bridge and out of sight.

‘Strike me!—would he?’ said Charley. ‘Why, he’d run from a daddy-longlegs, he would! You just watch, and see how pale he will be in a minute. I have got here—’ and Charley pulled another envelope from his pocket. ‘Now, watch him, Lottie, I have got here one of his *own* letters—a love-letter to Marty. See, I told you so: he’s all in a shiver! Ah, my friend, you’d give a hundred pounds for this little slip of paper, wouldn’t you?—here, take it, Lottie!’

But before she could reach it, Dexter, losing

all presence of mind, darted forward, cried 'No you don't, it's mine!' snatched it from his hand, turned, and dashed through the bridge. Charley was after him in a minute. Dexter, plunging his irons like spurs into the ice, strained every muscle; clink-clank fell the strokes of steel, with ice-dust streaming like smoke from the gutters—Charley steadily gaining—until, right before Dexter, suddenly yawned a great black hole. Charley, seeing it first, cried 'Stop, stop!' but Dexter, heedless of the danger, bent himself to a longer stroke, then suddenly threw up his arms, ground his heels into the ice, and disappeared feet first in the dark water.

Lottie, who had been a witness of it all, gave a shriek and hurried to the spot.

'Oh, my God—help, help!' cried Dexter, clinging with his fingers to the slippery rim of ice, and raising a face full of terror and entreaty to Charley and Lottie.

Charley stood stock still, and looked at him; the letter had dropped from Dexter's hand, and Charley picked it up.

'Oh, Charley, Charley!—why don't you save him?' cried Lottie, kneeling and extending her hand, which Smythe immediately seized.

‘Keep back!’ he said; ‘he is coward enough to draw you under with him. He says he can swim, why don’t he? He saved Marty’s life, he says. This is the very hole into which she fell; why don’t he save himself?’

‘Oh!—help, help, my good fellow! I’m frozen to the bone!’ cried Dexter.

‘Oh, I’m jolly glad of it! You know, now, how it feels! But wait till you get to the bottom of the river, where *I* was, and then your very heart will turn into ice.’

Dexter gave a terrible groan, and Lottie once more pleaded. His head sank at intervals; he was choking with the water which he swallowed at every instant.

‘That man swim?’ said Charley, contemptuously; ‘why, look at him, the fool! He doesn’t know enough to keep his mouth shut! Shut it up, you idiot, or you’ll sink!’

‘I’m sinking now! oh! for heaven’s sake have pity!’

‘Charley! Charley! will you let him die before my eyes?’ cried Lottie.

‘Say you can’t swim, then!’ said Charley, who saw that the numbed and purple fingers could no longer retain their grip upon the ice.

‘No, no, I can’t,’ said Dexter.

At this moment the small boy came up with eyes like goggles and said :

‘ Oh Lord !’

‘ Oh ! it’s you, is it, young fireworks,’ said Charley, recognising the young Briton he had encountered in the Limeborough streets. ‘ Well, run and bring that plank yonder. I think it has done duty before in this sort of business. Look sharp !’

The plank thrust across the opening, Mr. Dexter’s hands were placed upon it by Charley.

‘ Not yet, not just yet, I’ll help you out in a moment. You can’t do it yourself, you know. Who saved Miss Martha’s life, you or I ? quick !’

‘ You.’

‘ Just you remember that, young fireworks.’

‘ All right, sir.’

‘ Now, is what she said in that letter true ? *Did* you engage yourself to her ?’

‘ Yes, yes—for God’s sake let me out !’

‘ Do you hear, young fireworks ?—he says he is engaged to be married to the young lady whose life he didn’t save.’

‘ I hear, sir.’

‘ Then come here and let us see what we

can do for the reverend gentleman. I am afraid he *is* rather damp and uncomfortable down there.'

When he was drawn out, the forlornest spectacle conceivable, from the water, Charley handed Lottie the envelope Dexter had dropped.

'A case of guilty conscience, you perceive, my poor misguided cousin; he is a fool as well as a knave. That is only my last week's washing bill.'

Dexter lifted up his eyes piteously to Lottie, but that young lady straightway turned her back upon him, and requested the small boy to remove her skates.

At this moment, as a carriage rattled along the causeway, Charley waved his hat as a signal of distress.

The horses stopped, and a lady, whom Charley recognised in an instant as Mrs. Summerfield, descended the river bank.

She was in a towering rage with Dexter, and showed him no pity whatever; for when Lottie said to her: 'An hour ago I thought I should become your daughter-in-law, Mrs. Summerfield, but that now can never be—' she answered: 'And you are right, you deserve something much better.'

She led him in silence to the carriage, and drove him to his lodgings in Sunnyside Terrace. He did not dine with Mr. Cadmus that night, but Charley did, and what was more, Mr. Cadmus made him a very handsome apology, and invited him to make his home henceforth at The Elms.

So the wind *had* changed, after all. Briggs couldn't get through pouring champagne into Charley's glass; his face shone with contentment; he made pantomimic signs of joy over his master's shoulders, and was caught in the act by means of the chimney-glass. Everybody in the house said, 'Oh my! it's too bad;' and looked as if they meant it when Charley insisted upon returning to London that night.

So the small boy's testimony, you see, was not required after all, and he was inclined to be sulky over it, too, on the way home across the meadows, for he had his sense of importance, like some of the rest of us. It is but just, however, to add that his ruffled feelings were fully assuaged in the end by a present of Charley's wonderful thirty shilling skates.

CHAPTER XI.

UNDER PRESSURE.

MRS. SUMMERFIELD'S parting words had had a singularly astringent effect, it would appear, upon the brewer's faith in the impeccability of his 'missis.' He would not even return to the house to see if she were better, but strode back in a towering rage to the brewery. His was not exactly the malleable temper to be beaten when in a white heat to any form at will. Out of such heat as causes the hardest granite to disintegrate and go to impalpable powder in twenty seconds comes the adamant which will dint rock crystal itself.

This was the kind of fire that now bubbled in John Brophy's veins. If he had gone back it was more than possible that he would have wrung his 'missis's' neck, with as little com-

punction as he would have strangled one of his own fowls.

There is no such terrible awakening, no such falling of scales from purblind eyes, as occurs when an ignorant man perceives that his idol is composed of baser metal than himself. There is a town in Bohemia called Znaim, another, better known, in Canada called Quebec, both of which, glistening in the sun from afar like celestial cities, thanks to the glamour of tin-covered roofs and steeples, would, in an older time and while the sun lasted, have excited high hopes in the breast of a silver-seeking Hernando Cortes or De Soto. Many unsagacious gold-hunters have had their hearts quickened by the sight of iron pyrites; and not a few towering and impressive wigs before now have sheltered addled brains from severe stress of weather. So that John, after all, had only awakened to a knowledge of the old *vanitas vanitatum*; and instead of thanking God that for so many years his peace and contentment had never been disturbed by anything more disquieting than a sudden rise in the price of hops and barley, he only ground his teeth and cursed himself for being a fool.

To think that he, John Brophy, the honest

man, the sun and centre of the Deadwick social system, who had earned every penny he had in the world by downright hard labour, should have been duped in this ignominious manner by an adventuress, a discharged servant, and a *thief*! Great heavens! what *was* the world coming to? And as for the French and the Latin and the Greek!

‘Fiddle-faddle faugh!’ he exclaimed. ‘Give me an honest lass as can say her prayers at night wi’out a blush, an’ hang the larnin’ an’ a’ the fine words, say I, if, when she wakens, her conscience’s as white as the morning light; for is na the parson a blackguard, wi’ all his grand talk an’ preachin’?’ And John, cooling by degrees to the rational point, entered his office, mixed a stiff glass of grog, and thought the whole wretched business out.

It was quite dark when he returned home. Mrs. Brophy, affecting an effusive welcome, which was unmistakably belied by her pinched and anxious face, met him at the door, and attempted to take his hat and coat, whereat he stared as at any other phenomenon for a moment, and then pushed her, with a gesture of impatience, aside, and entered the kitchen. This was such an unfavourable symptom that

the smile she had hitherto maintained upon her face—the merest rush-light flicker—died completely out, her jaw relaxed and fell, and for a moment she stood, an image of despair, at the dining-room door.

The sound of John's voice, suddenly raised to the exclamatory point, then caught her attention; and she crept noiselessly through the hall and listened to his concluding words:

‘So mind,’ he said, ‘I go to London by the first train i’ the morning; an’ if you say a word to the missis—remember!’

At this point Lydia glided away from the door; and John, when he entered the dining-room a moment later, found her sitting, rigid and cold as ice, with a copy of the *Daily Telegraph* in her hand.

‘Hum!’ he said; ‘I’m going to Limeborough. Is the tea ready?’

She put down her paper, and took a seat at the tea-table. No further word passed between them. He rose at last, put on his hat, and went out of the front-door, slamming it after him.

She neither said a word nor raised her eyes as he quitted the room, but when he had gone, she dashed down the spoon with which she had been stirring her tea, and leaping to

her feet, commenced to pace the floor in great excitement.

At last she rang the bell.

‘Mary,’ she said, as the servant appeared in answer to the summons, ‘oh, Mary! I heard what your master said in the kitchen. He is going to see some dreadful woman in London, Mary, and no wonder he told you to keep it from me. Oh! oh! oh!’

‘Eh? No! the maister be’ant o’ that sort.’

‘Don’t you believe it, Mary. *All* men are alike; there isn’t one true man in the world.’

Mary, being a woman, had the same opinion of the other sex. But as she was not personally concerned in the matter—when she would have been very savage indeed—she vindicated her womanhood by feeling rather more anxious for John than sorry for her mistress.

Lydia the cunning saw this at once. So, dropping her air of concern, she said, in another tone:

‘Now, Mary, I don’t intend to be beaten by Mr. Brophy, and if you will keep your mouth shut until to-morrow night—that is not very long, I’m sure—I will give you a sovereign.’

The servant's eyes became as big as saucers. The bait was sufficient, and Mrs. Brophy, perceiving it, took her purse from her pocket and counted out ten shillings.

‘The rest,’ she said, ‘you shall have to-morrow if you keep your word.’

Which Mary, highly elated, solemnly promised to do. Whereupon Mrs. Brophy immediately ascended to her bed-room, locked the door, darkened the window-blinds, changed her dress for a wrapper, and then, ransacking her boxes and drawers for material, sat down at last, needle in hand, to alter an old mourning costume, when she suddenly sprang from her chair and rang the bell.

‘Mary,’ she said, admitting the servant to the chamber, and locking the door, ‘I forgot to mention one thing—Mr. Brophy will probably walk to Limeborough in the morning—he always does—and will take the nearest way across the meadows. So James must have the trap ready for me—somewhere out of sight, you know—and take me by the main road as far as the High Street. I can walk from there to the station, don’t you see? and have my ticket bought before he arrives. Now I want you to see James at once. Tell him what I desire, and give him this half-

sovereign; another ten shillings he shall have when I leave the trap to-morrow. Quick! Mary, and come back and tell me what he says.'

Mary soon returned with James's duty; he accepted the money with thanks, and would keep a sharp look-out in the morning, lest his 'measter' should see him.

Meantime, Mrs. Brophy plied the needle incessantly, and finished her task upon the stroke of midnight, when came John's thundering rat-tat at the front door, and she had just time enough to thrust her work into a drawer, put out the light, strip off her wrapper and crawl into bed, before the entrance of her irate lord. He was rather the worse for beer, or some more potent form of refreshment, which had clearly tended to set the edge of his irascibility.

'Sleeping, be you,' he growled, 'an' wi' your conscience a pricking ye like pins and needles, too. Mayhap you'll na' sleep so sound to-morrow night, though, my fine lady.' And he dashed down one of his boots, and began to circulate like a young simoon about the chamber. Lydia, however, judiciously slept through the fracas of overturned chairs and a broken water-jug, whereat John

marvelled again, and then went to sleep himself.

He was up again at daybreak, made his toilet *à tâtons*, so as not to awaken Mrs. Brophy (who, by the way, had not slept at all), and descended in his stocking feet to the dining-room. Snow was falling in great sticky clots as he left the house, and Lydia, peering anxiously through the venetians, was afraid that he might avoid the meadow path and take the direct road to Limeborough; but, unhappily for her, her fears were not verified; she saw him cross the bridge and disappear from view behind the pollards on the other side of the Ooze.

Then she dressed herself with the greatest expedition, and descended in black from head to foot, with the thickest of crape veils over her face, and nearly frightened Mary to death. 'La! mim, 'ee did gie me such a start,' she said; and James, who had been waiting in an adjoining lane with the trap, felt his jaw drop at sight of the strange apparition which appeared before him a moment later. Being a silent man, however, he never opened his mouth but once, and that was to thank her for ten shillings at the end of her journey. This occurred in a back lane near the High

Street, Limeborough, whence Mrs. Brophy pursued her way on foot to the railway station, where, without raising her veil or in otherwise disclosing her identity to the booking-clerk, she purchased a first-class ticket for King's Cross. This done, she retired to the ladies' waiting-room, and watched through the window for John's arrival. When he came, simultaneously with the train, she had to pass him in crossing the platform, but he, glancing at her without recognition, leaped into a third-class smoking-carriage and disappeared; whereupon, feeling much reassured, she tapped the guard on the arm, and slipped a half crown into his hand as she entered an empty compartment.

'Thanks, ma'am, you'll not be disturbed,' he said, locking the door as the train moved on. At King's Cross she saw John enter the refreshment room, and immediately called a hansom. It was then just eleven o'clock.

John, having a little time to spare, loitered on the way, and arrived at the Bank of England punctually upon the stroke of noon. Mrs. Summerfield and her solicitor were waiting for him in the court, and advanced at once to meet him as he entered. He was

very nervous, and his face wore a genuine look of distress as he exchanged greetings with her and accepted Mr. Krinkle's proffered hand. Then, in silence, and with the air of being at a funeral or an execution, he followed them into the banking-room.

Mr. Krinkle led the way at once to the wrong desk, but he explained it by saying in a whisper: 'This gentleman is a personal friend of mine, and will answer our questions. The other cashier wouldn't, and very properly too, for we are all strangers to him.' With that, he stretched his hand across the counter and said: 'How de do, Runyon; this,' turning to John, 'is Mr. Brophy, Mr. Runyon, and he wants to make a few inquiries about his wife's account. She has one here, I believe—Lydia Brophy; will you be good enough to see?'

Mr. Runyon would with pleasure, and after conferring with one of the book-keepers, reported that there was to the credit of Mrs. Brophy upon the ledger the sum of £2800 sterling, an announcement which made John's hair stand straight up inside his hat, and brought a look like forked lightning out of Mrs. Summerfield's eyes.

At this moment, however, a clerk stepped

up and whispered something clearly unexpected in Mr. Runyon's ear, for the latter immediately bent over his desk and said in a anxious tone :

‘I was mistaken ; it appears Mrs. Brophy closed up her account with us about half an hour ago ;’ and as a look of consternation suddenly appeared in the three faces before him, he hastily added : ‘why, what is the matter ? is anything wrong ?’

‘Wrong ! I should think so,’ commenced Mrs. Summerfield, in a voice audible to every person in the room, when Mr. Krinkle interrupted her.

‘Sh !’ he said, ‘and remain here one moment. I am going to speak to the manager.’

John had turned the colour of ashes, his tongue seemed glued to the roof of his mouth, his pulse stood still. The end of all things had come at last, in very truth. He must be the centre of the solar system with a vengeance, when such events could come to pass. Petrification of every faculty was rapidly taking place, when a ray of light suddenly sped from Mrs. Summerfield's eyes like a sting, and revived him. It would have pierced a denser intellect than his. It was a look of intense suspicion.

‘You need na’ glower at me i’ that way, as if I knew all about it,’ he said, wrathfully; ‘what wi’ leaving the missis asleep i’ the bed, an’ then finding that she’s come, as you might say by telegraph, and drawed the money out, an’ everything topsy-turvy, an’ past all knowledge, it’s a fine thing to have throwed i’ your face, *that* is. If there’s been games played, they’ve been played on both on us, an’ it isn’t *you* as ull suffer the most neyther. If the money’s yours, an’ its gone, an’ it can’t be found—then I’ve got to mortgage up th’ old brewery an’ pay it, that’s all. She may be a bad un—God on’y knows, for it’s all dark eno’ to me now, but as I’ve said afore, she’s my missis, an’ I’ll pay every farthing as you can prove to me wasn’t come by honest, mind that. But then I donna wish to go feeling my way about i’ the dark, an’ I’m not yet quite satisfied, either, for happen there be *two* Mrs. Brophys—you see.’

‘Which, unfortunately, is not the case,’ interposed Mr. Krinkle, who reappeared at this instant, holding a slip of paper in his hand. ‘You will perceive by this memorandum that the lady in question resides in Deadwick, Stubbleshire, and if that is not sufficient proof, Mr. Runyon’ (turning to that official) ‘will

favour you with a view of her signature, I am sure.'

John could not deny the hand-writing when it was submitted to him, but he said :

'I canna make it out ; the missis were like as she were full o' laudanum for sleep when I left t'house this morning, an' now you tell me she's a been here afore me. Mayhap, somebody now can tell me how she was dressed.'

Mr. Runyon called one of the cashiers, and repeated the question to him. The answer nearly knocked John down.

'She was in deep mourning,' it would appear, 'with a heavy crape veil over her face.'

'You're right. I'll na' dispute you more,' said John, in a tone of great dejection, 'an' I thank ye kindly, sir, for your information. I understan' it now—she came by the same train as mysen, for I saw a female i' black upo' the Limeborough platform, as must ha' been her. Eh, but it's a bad go, this 'ere,' and he shook his head sadly. 'Howiver,' he added, turning to Mrs. Summerfield, 'you need na' fear about the money. I niver break my word when once 'tis gi'en, an' you know where to find me when I'm wanted. But God has gi'en me the good gift o' honesty,

an' bein' proud o' His gift, that as bears *my* name must niver be called a thief. Mind that! I'm going back to th' home as maybe never 'ull be a home to me again—an' maybe it 'ull be a case of murder afore I am through. Never mind: whatever may happen to *me* through this here trouble, *your* money 'ull be safe, but you must promise me never to say a word again' the missis. I'm a plain man mysen, an' a ignorant man, an' though I have heard of a deal o' wickedness an' a robbing o' people, it always seemed like foreign wars, an' wild injuns, an' such things afar off from my little place, an' I could na' really abear to hear the neighbours about say as *my* missis had stole as much as a ha'penny from any other woman alive, so you *must* promise me that.'

'My good man,' said Mrs. Warren, earnestly, 'with all my heart I promise it.'

'Thank 'ee kindly, ma'am, thank 'ee—good-bye, an' don't fret about the money, I'm sure to find it. Good-bye, sir,' and John, with a face half tears, half iron-determination, strode heavily, and a trifle unsteadily, from their presence.

Mr. Krinkle exchanged a look with his

client, as much as to say, 'do you approve his going away like that?'

'Oh, it's all right—the poor fellow is as honest as the Bank of England itself,' she said. 'But this Mivart—you have found him you say; are you sure?'

'Yes, he has lodgings in Gerrard Street, near Leicester Square. The warrant for his arrest will be in the hands of an officer this evening.'

'Very well, but whatever you do, do *not* let him slip through your fingers.'

'Oh dear no, he is living there quietly and unsuspectingly enough. In the meantime, shall I leave Mr. Brophy to you?'

'If you please, yes.'

Shortly afterwards they separated, and Mr. Krinkle, returning to Lincolns' Inn Fields, acquainted Mr. Palmer with the result of the morning's investigation.

Two hours later Charley Smythe, fresh from a long interview with his solicitor, had recourse to the card which M. Mivart had given him in the Leicester Square *café*, and then, calling a cab, drove as quickly as possible to Gerrard Street. A little, dingy, third-rate hotel, vending *bouillon à emporter*

on the ground floor, with *cabinets, et salons de société* higher up, proved to be M. Mivart's present address. Moreover, the gentleman himself, as Charley entered the smoky restaurant, was seated at a table in tranquil enjoyment of dominoes and absinthe.

'Ah!' he said, springing from his chair, 'I haf been looking for you, but you do not seem quite well. There is nossing the matter, I hope. Marthe, she is——'

'Hush, old man! I want to speak to you somewhere alone!' said Charley in a whisper. 'Oh, don't look frightened; I'm your friend, never fear! Can we have a bottle of champagne in a private room?'

'Certainly,' and Mivart turned and spoke to a waiter in French. 'What kind of wine? dry, I suppose?' he added, 'though the French people, you know, prefer the Cliquot, or some wine with much *liqueur* in it.'

'Anything,' said Charley, 'only hurry!—there is not much time to lose; and tell the waiter to bring pen and ink with him, too.'

Whereupon, having given these instructions, M. Mivart, with a very uncomfortable expression upon his face, led the way to a little *cabinet* upon the second floor. Charley rang the changes upon the weather until the

waiter, after depositing writing materials, glasses, and a bottle of wine upon the table, retired from the room; then he stood up, with his back against the door, and said :

‘ Let us get through with business first, and drink afterwards. Take that pen, Mivvert, and write on the top of a full sheet: “ I, August Mivvert, do solemnly declare——” ’

‘ Mais, mon Dieu ! I do not understand zis thing,’ said the Frenchman, starting like a spectre to his feet.

‘ Go on, and write. Don’t I tell you I am a friend ?—you will see what it means, soon enough.’

Mivart looked at Charley a moment, in ill-disguised dismay, and then, seizing the pen, began to write. When the scratching ceased :

‘ You have got that down ?’ demanded Charley. ‘ Well, go on : “ do solemnly declare that I was in Perth Amboy, State of New Jersey, United States of America, on the 19th of August, 1861, when, during a violent storm, a fisherman and myself”——’

‘ Nom de Dieu !’ cried Mivart, turning faint with terror, ‘ is it then a rat-trap I am in ?’

‘ It will be soon, if you don’t hurry. A

warrant is being prepared for your arrest at this moment.'

'So *that* is your little games, eh?' said Mivart, leaping from his chair and making a spring at Charley.

Whereupon the latter drew a revolver from his pocket and pointed to the table.

'Sit down,' said he; 'don't trifle with *me*, and don't make an ass of *yourself*. Can't you see that I am in love with your daughter, and intend to shield you if I can for her sake?'

The Frenchman collapsed instantly. 'You are the devil himself,' said he; 'you know everyting.'

'Very well! do as I tell you, then. I am in no mood for any nonsense, and won't have it. Are you ready?'

'Yes.'

"A fisherman and myself witnessed the capsizing of a yacht, belonging to Mr. Charles Summerfield, of Perth Amboy, who was on board of her at the time, and perished, in spite of all my efforts to rescue him and restore him to life. I further declare that, after dividing the valuables we found upon his person, my share of which was a draft upon London"——'

M. Mivart's hand trembled so now, that he could scarcely write.

“A draft upon London,” Charley repeated, “for forty thousand pounds, which I collected upon a forged endorsement, and out of which I gave to my sister, Lydia Parker, now Lydia Brophy, the sum of four thousand pounds for keeping my crime a secret, we buried the body in a cleft of the rock, where it has been recently found.”

‘Tonnerre de Dieu ! is zat so ?’

‘Zat is so—go on.’

When the scratching of Mivart's pen had ceased, Charley said :

‘Now, read that over aloud.’

M. Mivart did so.

‘That seems to be straight as a string. Sign your name to it.’

Again M. Mivart complied.

‘Now,’ continued Charley, folding up the document, and putting it into his pocket, ‘this I am going to place in Martha's hands, and it shall be a guarantee of your good behaviour. You know, of course, that her mother is dead?’

‘Yes.’

‘She was not your wife at any time ?’

‘No.’

‘Nor Mr. Summerfield's wife ?’

‘No.’

‘Well, then, you must have suspected that when the *true* Mrs. Summerfield learned of her husband’s death and the disappearance of so much money, she would claim all Marty’s property, and be after somebody else—meaning you—with a very sharp stick?’

‘I supposed it—yes.’

‘Well, sir, she *is* after you; and I propose to give you, for Marty’s sake, as I told you before, just two hours in which to make yourself scarce. Have you any money?’

‘Very little; four—five sovereigns——’

‘What, for God’s sake! did you do with the thirty-six thousand pounds? Where did it all go to? You drew it out of the bank, I know!’

‘Mostly to Baden-Baden—where is such a deep hole to throw the sovereigns!’ and Mivart, rapidly recovering his spirits, smiled for the first time since he entered the room.

‘*Lost!* do you mean?’

‘On the red. Yes; I was always a fool like that. I should haf played on the black, and break bank.’

‘Well, you’re a beauty, *you* are,’ said Charley. ‘What have you done, then, with

the two hundred pounds Mrs. Brophy gave you the other day ?'

Oh, as for that, M. Mivart, it appeared, had had the worst kind of luck at billiards recently.

'By Jove, what a man ! Well, here's a fifty-pound note ; and now you'd better drink your wine, pack up your shirt-collars and things, get out of this house, and skedaddle out of the country as quickly as possible,' said Charley, gulping down a glass of champagne and ringing for the bill. 'Never mind about the *thanks*,' he added ; 'I only do it because you are Marty's father ; don't make any mistake about *that*. Good-bye, old man, and look lively, or you'll be bagged as sure as fate !'

As Charley passed into the street again a cab drove up, and a lady in black and heavily veiled hastily descended and entered the hotel.

'Hang me if that isn't Parker !' said he. 'I wonder what the deuce is to pay now ?'

But having no time for investigation just then, he walked on down the street. Despite his recent rebuff he was determined to see Martha at all hazards that afternoon. It was a great disappointment, therefore, when, upon his

arrival at her lodgings in Bayswater, he learned that she had gone out of town—to Limeborough, it was believed.

He had had a terrible throbbing pain in his head all day. By the time he reached home, sledge-hammers seemed to be beating through his brain ; then he was shaken nearly to pieces by a chill. By midnight he was on fire with fever, then the landlady thought it was time to send for a doctor.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DOWN EXPRESS.

A TERRIBLE snow-storm has been raging all day upon the Limeborough meadows. The snowflakes have come in swarms, like the Egyptians locusts, and have devoured the land. They have fastened themselves upon the bark of trees, upon the whips of alder and willow upon the river-banks, upon the thatched roofs and mud walls of cottages, and have consumed all the blacks and greys within the sweep of the horizon. A sticky paste lies upon the meadows; and upon the highway, the snow has been churned into yellow slush by horses' feet and wagon-wheels. At a distance, the hedgerows seem shrouded in linen; the telegraph-wires sag heavily with the weight of clinging particles, and resemble lines of cotton wick. Up to nightfall, it has clearly been the mood of the

weather to bury Stubbleshire alive. Then a lull ensues, and for half-an-hour there is a great bustle among the clouds ; and Stubbleshire folk, peeping anxiously through their window-panes, conclude that the sting has been taken out of the storm at last. But they are mistaken. The weather hitherto has been playful, after all. Now it means to show of what stuff storms are made. The weather-cocks, to begin with, suddenly veer round to dead north-west ; the thermometers drop fifteen degrees in as many minutes ; the wind leaps upon the meadows with a howl ; and at all last, after a preliminary spitting, down comes the snow again—hard, granular, and pelting like fine shot or the siftings of infinite hail-stones upon the blanched and shivering earth.

By eight o'clock the meadows are a black and howling wilderness. The very air is congested with snow, and impervious to light and sound. Even the red light in the signal-box, just outside of Limeborough can do no more than give a feeble tinge, as of blood, to a few flying particles ; while the yellow light in the window is but a dirty smear upon the terrible outer blackness. The signalman, knowing that the up express is twenty minutes late,

feels a great sense of responsibility to-night. Now, if ever, he must have his wits about him ; and though he cannot explain his feeling of anxiety upon the subject, he finds himself nervously watching the telegraphic indicator from minute to minute, as if the needles might for once record some startling intelligence without his knowledge.

‘No engine-driver could see his way ten feet into this storm,’ he thinks, as he presses his face against the window, and shading his eyes with his hands, peers this way and that into the closing darkness. Nothing is visible but a semaphore, creaking like a gibbet in the wind, and the up plates, swept clean by a goods’-train, which he knows has been safely shunted at Limeborough and out of harm’s way. The other track is blotted out, as are the broad expanse of marshes, the winding river, and the long perspective of glittering rails, reaching as far as the smelting works in the Stubbleshire hills, where, night after night, he has watched the reflection of furnace-fires upon the clouds.

He is glad to hear the bell tinkle at last, and to learn that the overdue train is now speeding across the meadows. In another moment the ground quakes, the windows

rattle, the hurly-burly of wind is deadened in a roar of wheels, and the express flies screaming into the darkness again.

‘Thank God!’ the signalman says. ‘There is now but the down express, and then I can eat my supper with a light heart.’ So he rakes out his little stove and is about to replenish the fire, when the bell tinkles again, and he starts up with a white face and examines the dial.

‘Is anything wrong?’ he telegraphs.

‘Nothing,’ is speedily answered back. ‘Obliged for want of siding room to shove on coal-train to smelting works. Down express five minutes late—plenty of time.’

And, soon after, the coal-train comes panting along—an interminable procession of funeral cars, with clanking irons and a great rattle of coupling-chains. And away it wriggles like a black snake over the sheeted meadows.

The signalman, with his face once more at the window, perceives, as it passes, that neither beginning nor end of it is at one time visible from the signal-box, thanks to the drifting snow. Again he thinks that never in his experience has he seen such a night as this, and, turning the red light once more

upon the storm, he sees nothing but two black lines in the snow, a shower of rose leaves, and an ugly smudge as of blood between the tracks below.

Retiring at last from the window, he sits where he can keep his eye upon the dial; for a strange fear and a strange solicitude in connection with that coal-train has within these few minutes crept into his heart; why, he cannot and never will be able to tell, though he could account for his noting, as an unusual circumstance, that the last wagon, instead of being a break-van, was an open one like the rest, upon which sat, as it passed, a man holding a white lantern in his hand instead of the customary danger signal.

Ah, thank Heaven! the bell jingles at last, and the train is safely shunted upon a siding at the smelting works. And now, jingle, jingle! it comes again for the last time, he thinks, until midnight, and he takes up a position by the window to see the down express as it thunders by in a lather of clinging snow, with all its streaming lights reflected an instant upon the shaken sashes of the signal-box.

All is well. The signalman smiles at his foolish fancies as he enters a record of the

passing trains in his book. Then, with a light heart, he bethinks himself at last of his supper, when comes a message from the smelting works that makes his hair stand on end. 'Danger! Block the line!' it said.

Meanwhile the coal train has crept out upon the long causeway, where the wind blows great guns, and every maddened snow flake has a sting to it like a gnat, and bites the engine driver's face and neck, and blinds his eyes as he struggles with all steam on to cross the meadows in the teeth of the gale. It is a toilsome business. The train is too long for one thing, and the wheels are clogged with ice and snow, which, acting in a measure the part of brakes, sensibly impede their progress. To make matters worse, when opposite Deadwick the driving wheels of the engine suddenly begin to spin around as if in the air, and the train with a great thumping and clanking comes to a dead stop. The man with the white light at the end can see nothing beyond the third or fourth wagon, from the one upon which he is perched; but he suspects the cause of the stoppage, and even thinks he can hear the curses of the driver as he descends to sprinkle sand upon the slippery track. Again, he fancies he

hears the sound of wheels in motion, but the wind roars so and the snow snaps and crackles at such a rate about his ears that he cannot be sure. Surely, though, it is time they were moving on, or the express will be upon them. What could the driver be about? and the man, becoming anxious, resolves at last to run down the line and ascertain. He gets as far as the fifth car and pauses, horror-stricken.

The rest of the train has disappeared.

The sudden wrench of starting has broken a coupling-pin, and here, with the wind shrieking wildly about them, stand, alone and motionless, five black cars like hearses in the ghastly light of the man's lantern.

He waves the light, and he shouts at the top of his voice, whereupon, the wind nearly blows him off the causeway, and the horror of the situation burns like a searing iron into his brain. He looks at his watch. The express is due in five minutes. The nearest signal-box is three miles distant. What is he to do? what can he do? Fortunately, the gale is at his back, and he is a good runner; if it were not for the low-lying places beyond the causeway, where his limbs will surely be hampered with the deep snow-drifts! He

has, at all events, a clear space before him of a quarter of a mile—rails and sleepers being swept clean as a floor—and off he dashes like a hound slipped from the leash. He will surely reach the express in time for the engine to be reversed;—his lantern and a red handkerchief will accomplish that much, he thinks. And here, suddenly ends the causeway; the meadows seem, all at once, to rise, while at the same moment, though he can see nothing, he feels the ground shake, and hears a dull reverberation in the air. Now, with a shout, he leaps forward, holding his handkerchief in such a way that the light shines full upon it, when his feet break through the crust of a frozen snow-drift, his lantern rolls into a ditch, and he himself is thrown violently upon his face, as with a shriek and a great glare and a scattering of red-hot cinders, the express bounds forward to its doom.

As the terrified eyes of the driver fell upon the ghastly line of wagons in his path, he had just time enough to touch the rod and send a scream out upon the gale such as made the heart of every dweller in Deadwick stand still with terror. Then there was a

thundering shock, a horrible splitting and rending of wood and iron, a crash of broken glass, and the din of escaping steam.

The nearest coal wagon leaped into the air and fell upon the others. The engine rose, as it were, upon its haunches, jumped across the six foot way, ploughed through the up plates, and rolling over the causeway, buried itself in three feet of meadow mud. Four carriages came crashing after. Then, a moment later, heart-rending moans and cries arose from the hideous wreck. One dying shriek, louder than the rest, pierced the hurly-burly of steam and wind, and even found its way to the ear of the Deadwick brewer.

CHAPTER XIII.

A RECOGNITION.

YOUR persistent star-gazer, if he live long enough, is certain, at last, to tire of falling into ditches and man-traps, and though it is to be feared that while love and asses' heads abound in the world, the race of Titanias will never become extinct, it is tolerably sure that Titania has her disillusions, her heart-aches, and, mayhap, her pocket-aches in the end.

Self-delusion is the special and undisputed prerogative of lovers. It is their unenviable privilege to discover no alloy in the basest metals, to see white where others perceive black, and to carry about exclusive latch-keys to the gates of a fool's paradise. But when the penetralia of an erotic faith are forcibly broken into, and rigid introspection betrays their utter emptiness, the humiliating discovery oftentimes exerts an influence beyond

all proportion to the cause upon the life of the disenchanted one.

This, however, would not have been true of Martha, had not her case been complicated by Charley's splendid loyalty and her own ingratitude. She had cut out the impress of Dexter from her heart with an unfaltering hand, and she would have applied to the wound the strong styptic of a passive and contemptuous forgetfulness, as became her pride, were it not for a knowledge of Charley's wrongs. This conviction as to his wrongs was, indeed, so poignant and unendurable, that it would have kept a pin-prick in a state of continual fester in her conscience. Hence, the greater wound promised to be hopelessly incurable; realising which, she resolved to do a supremely foolish thing. Instead of seeking to mitigate his grief by the only means in her power, she determined to begin at once a life of penance and expiation in another land. She would write, though, before quitting England, and humbly confess the wrong she had done him; and to make her atonement still more conspicuous, she proposed, now that she had begun to appreciate Charley at his true worth, to delay the writing until the eve of her departure (which she hoped would

be on Tuesday at the farthest), and to preclude any chance of his answering, by withholding from everybody a knowledge of her future address.

To carry out this stoical resolution, it was necessary, as a prelude to more important operations, to visit Deadwick and remove her effects with all possible expedition from the brewery cottage. Hence it befell that about the time John Brophy was bracing himself up with something warm in the King's Cross refreshment-room, Martha, upon the other side of the platform, was industriously feeing porters at a carriage door of the eleven-fifteen down express.

She had a general impression that the skies were leaden, the wind waspish, the landscape stark and cold, and the foot-warmer beneath her dainty soles a by no means despicable item of creature comfort, when suddenly with a shriek the train bolted into a long tunnel and came humming out at last into a snow-storm which one might have prodded with a spade.

‘That’s a New England storm wandered over here in the night and got lost,’ she said, ‘and I hope it will prove to be a little one.’

Which it proved *not* to be, for the air thickened as they advanced, absorbing more or less of daylight, and blotting out the very telegraph poles. At Middleborough Junction the guard, an imaginative man, reported the snow to be knee deep, whereupon Martha, thinking of the Deadwick meadows, found her teeth going off into a chatter, and straight-way demanded 'a foot warmer with some *heat* in it,' which, the millennium not having yet arrived, she of course did not get in exchange for her shilling. At Limeborough all the railway porters were shovelling snow from the platform, and Martha's boots were soaked by the time she reached the George Inn, where, for an adequate consideration, a carriage, it appeared, could be obtained for her journey across the meadows.

And such a journey as it proved to be ! The poor horse slipped and floundered—the carriage at one time tilted over with wheels hub-deep in a ditch—while the driver swore, and slush splattered against the windows and obscured even the mad whirl of snow-flakes, which, in turn, blotted out the meadows and the pollards and all familiar landmarks as effectually as the blackest night would have done. In this wise Deadwick and the

cottage door were reached at last, when a glimpse of Bedlam became visible in the person of a little mulatto girl gone mad with joy over her mistress's arrival. On seeing this, Jehu, more than ankle-deep in snow, limp, sodden, ill-natured, with a suspicion of profanity visibly lurking about his lips, relaxed at once, possibly urged thereto by a collateral incentive in the shape of a request to step into the kitchen, where Martha did not disdain to follow him. Jehu, a very flaxen man, found it a pleasant matter to watch Katty's glittering black eyes and *café au lait* tinted complexion, as she busied herself with the decoction of a glass of steaming negus. Then, wishing Martha a 'very good health, miss,' he tilted the glass upon his nether lip, and straightway experienced a fine sense of physical invigoration.

'That's what I call werry kind an' 'orspable, miss,' he said, shuffling toward the door. 'An' it's a good deal more'n the lady did as I brought down here yesterday,' he added, with the air of one recalling a disagreeable reminiscence.

'Oh! a lady!' and Martha flashed a look of interrogation upon Jehu, which quite disconcerted him for a moment.

‘Yes, miss,’ he answered, ‘she as picked up the parson on the way back; she were his mother, by what I could make out; but sich a lookin’ party as *he* was, Lord! you’d a died, miss. But drawed out er the werry same hole as he didn’t draw the young lady out er, that’s what made *me* larf, you see.’

‘Dat’s so, missis,’ cried Katty, clapping her hands and laughing; ‘de *berry* same hole!’

‘For mercy’s sake, what has happened?’ exclaimed Martha. ‘Are you alluding to Mr. Dexter?’

‘Shuah, shuah! Dat preacher-man go down sock! in de *berry* same hole as you did, missis. An’ Marsr Smythe, he keep ’um in de water, an’ make ’um say his prayers an’ confess all his sins an’ *den* pull ’um out. An’ Miss Lottie dar too, an’ turn ’um back, ’cause dat Dexter can’t swim. Well, dat jes’ do me heap o’ good; ’fore God it does, missis!’

Martha sank into a chair, too astonished for the moment to speak.

Jehu, for his part, gazed in open-mouthed wonder to find himself in the actual presence of the lady he had recently heard so much about. Then she asked him to give her a history of the whole affair, which he straight-

way proceeded to do, imparting to his narrative not a little local colouring and embellishment, as a matter of course. Whereupon she thanked him and gave him a half-crown for his trouble.

‘By the way,’ she added, as he was leaving the kitchen, ‘I shall want a carriage and a van large enough to hold five boxes to-morrow.’

‘Sunday, miss?’ Jehu being a little surprised at this.

‘Yes, in time for me to reach the afternoon train for London. Can it be done?’

‘Oh yes, miss, I’ll see to it myself; so make your mind aisy;’ and he touched his forelock.

Again Martha thanked him, and Jehu vanished at last.

Katty confirmed his story, embellishments and all, and then expressed a fervent wish that ‘Marsr Smythe come back again pretty quick now,’ a hope which Martha peremptorily nipped in the bud by declaring it to be her fixed determination never to see his face again. Katty, to do her justice, was inclined to be severely argumentative, after her fashion, and received the news of her mistress’s altered fortunes with far greater equanimity than she did the former announcement.

‘Money!’ she said; ‘go along, missis, what’s dat ’mount to. Jes’ tink o’ dat por boy, a breakin’ his heart fo’ you. ’Pears as if I can see him now, stannin’ at de door with his por’ white face, an’ turned fro’ de house for dat—dat ’bomlable preacher-man. ’Fore de Lord, I wish I’d choked when I told dat lie ’bout your bein’ done gone away.’

Martha sighed and was silent for a moment; then she sprang up and said :

‘Well, it cannot be helped. Come, child, get to work. Everything must be packed this evening, and in readiness for our journey to-morrow. I have no time now for further talk.’

So fires were kindled in all the grates, boxes were dragged out from dark corners, and the cottage, stripped of all adornment, straightway began to show its age and naked decrepitude. Madame Le Brun and the blue Madonna descended from their mouldy state upon the walls. The miraculous draught of fishes, as set forth in damp and musty tapestry, disappeared beneath a box-lid. Ivories and old china followed next; and then came black night, with shrieking chimneys, rattling sashes, and the outer air filled with such howls as might come from a pack of famished wolves. So Martha’s heart being

full of gloom and disquietude, she replenished every fire and lighted every candle in the cottage, and worked away with might and main at the task before her. An hour—two, three, four hours passed thus; and then, at last, her work was finished.

Throwing herself, with a sigh, into a chair, she started to her feet again, with an exclamation of terror, as a loud knock came at the street-door. Then, perceiving that Katty stood quaking and paralysed with fear, she stepped to the window, and pressed her face against the panes. A dingy lantern-gleam lay upon the lower door-step, by the reflection of which she saw, amid the falling snow-flakes, the adumbration merely of a man's form.

‘Why, Katty!’ she exclaimed, ‘I believe it is Mr. Brophy; run to the door quick. What can he want on such a night as this?’

She had not been mistaken. In another moment, John staggered into the room, pale, haggard; his hair and beard clotted with snow, and in the wildest disorder; his eyes red with passion, and a dangerous gleam in them as he strode up to Martha and said:

‘Look here! I’ve got a word or two to say to you. Where’s my missis?’

‘Your missis!’ repeated Martha, shrinking in dismay. ‘For heaven’s sake, man, what do you mean—what *is* the matter?’

‘My missis, yes,’ said John, putting down his lantern, and drawing a crumpled piece of paper from his pocket. ‘Look a’ that! D’ye see? She’s gone an’ left me—the missis has; an’ I say as it’s a’ *your* doin’s, miss, whate’er your name may be. D’ye hear?—a’ *your* doin’s.’

This was going a little too far. Whatever else Martha might be, she was not, in a physical sense, a coward; and before this insult, her fears fled like darkness chased by a lime-light. The blood sprang to her face; she threw up her head, and flashed back a look at him that made him wince.

‘Remove your hat, sir,’ she said, ‘and don’t forget that you are talking to a lady. Katty, take Mr. Brophy’s hat and give him a chair.’

John, predetermined to sweep everything before him, was so much disconcerted by this unexpected performance, that he obeyed her injunction at once.

‘Now, Mr. Brophy,’ she continued, ‘if you will be good enough to lower your voice a little, you may continue, please.’

He gave her a surly look. She might be safe behind that escarpment of feminine courage and tact ; but, by the Lord ! his anger was not to be thus easily quenched.

‘Well,’ he answered, ‘there ’tis, in two or three words o’ her own writing, as she’s left me, an’s never coming back.’

‘I see,’ said Martha, glancing at the paper ; ‘but what have *I* to do with her going away ?’

‘Well, upo’ my word, if that don’t beat iverything !’ said John, in a tone of passionate disgust. ‘Now, look ’ee here—a gran’ lady by the name o’ Warren were here yesterday.’

‘I know it,’ said Martha. ‘At least,’ she quickly added, ‘I heard of it this afternoon.’

‘Eh, you did ! Well, she said as how the night I gave you shelter, you’d seen the missis walk i’ her sleep, an’ open the box i’ the spare chamber where you lay.’

‘I did not tell her so, at all events,’ said Martha, indignantly.

‘Well, niver mind now how she came to know it ; ’tis eno’ that she *did* know it, an’ she said as how *she* was Mrs. Summerfield, an’ your mother wasn’t ; though *you’d* thought different a’ your life, an’ believed, too, the

property was a' your own, which it isn't. So she came t' me an' said : " There's summat i' that box, an't belongs to me." Whereupon, I up an' bid the missis open it afore us both, an' put the lady to shame. But, no, she would na do it, an' so, wi' my brain all in a hum like, I fetched an axe an' smashed it to bits.'

' And, of course, there you found——'

' I found naught—*that's* what I found ; an' I turned upo' the lady an' said, " It's a fine thing for people to go about accusin' an honest man's missis o' things as they canna' prove," I said. An' I was a fool for talkin' i' that way, for *she* turned an' said summat about a Frenchman as the missis knew, an' your mother knew—ah, that makes you pale a bit, eh!—an' how the missis had a bank account at London. An', God help me ! it a' turns out to be true ; an' she's got the money, an' now she's gone. Heaven ha' mercy upon her soul !'

John buried his face in his hands a moment, before he went on :

' So, you see, I'm disgraced like i' my own village ; an' it seems somehow as if, but for your coming here an' taking the cottage, a' this trouble might ha' been prevented. An'

I'll speak out honest, an' say as how I thought it a bit queer for a young girl wi' diamonds upo' the fingers to come an' bide in such a place as this. But then you seemed so good an' honest, an' I liked your face an' your winning ways.'

'Haven't you said enough, Mr. Brophy?' interrupted Martha, in a choking voice. 'You are a strong man, I am only a woman; and you should not be too hard upon me, especially as I—I am in very great trouble myself. I pity you—I really, truly do, from the bottom of my heart. I can imagine what you must feel. It must be terrible. Yes, I know—for my own heart is breaking, and my own brain is fast going mad! Everything I had in the world is gone; everybody I ever loved or cared for has been taken from me. I am more than an orphan—more than penniless—I am accursed! I bring nothing but evil to those whom I would serve. I have earned nobody's gratitude, nobody's love; I am alone, and wretched, and in despair. I may deserve it all; but, for mercy's sake! do not upbraid me, Mr. Brophy. My cup is full—I cannot bear any more.'

Whereupon she burst into loud sobs, which began to stir the fibres of John's honest heart.

‘There, there, now,’ he said. ‘I did na’ mean to be *too* hard upo’ ye. *Eh; my God! what is that?*’

He ran to the outer door, threw it open and listened. Mingled with the wind, there came a confused sound as of human cries and the hiss of escaping steam; then a woman’s shriek tingled in his ears, and made his blood fairly run cold. By this time Martha was by his side.

‘What is it?’ she said.

‘Gie me my lantern, quick,’ he cried; ‘there’s a train gone to smash upo’ the meadows,’ and dashing out into the storm, he pounded at the nearest cottage-door, and bade its owner waken all his neighbours, and bring them down as quickly as possible to the causeway. Then, plunging through the snow-drifts in a narrow lane, at the side of the brewery, and across an orchard in the rear, he at length reached the meadows; where the wind fell upon him tooth and nail—roared, and snarled, and bit, and stung; contesting every foot of his journey, until, conquering at last, he climbed the causeway, and saw a sight that blanched his face and made his very soul sicken within him.

For all the rest of his life, the memory of

that night will seem a perfect devil's dance of horrors. Never can he forget the great bon-fire upon the causeway, hissing with melted snow-flakes, and tinging the whistling storm a visible blood-red ; the crash of axes among jammed and interlocked timbers ; the awful groans of the wounded ; the screams of locomotives hastening down with relief ; the ghastly forms lying uncovered upon the whitened roadway ; the howling desolation of the black meadows ; and that last poignant, supremest agony of all.

Two hours later, Martha, nearly distraught with terror and suspense, heard the sound of voices in the road, and saw, from the door, a group of men about the brewery gate, or such part of it as was visible above a heaped-up snow-drift, four feet deep, gleaming sallow and cold in the light of a dozen lanterns. A dozen spades were soon at work ; and then the gate swung noisily upon its hinges. Not a word was spoken, as something was lifted gently from the snow and borne within. Then Martha heard the click of a lock, followed by the striking of a match. Still listening, she heard, a moment later, the soft crunching of snow-flakes beneath a heavy rustic foot ; a

padlock rattled, a hasp fell, and the stable-door flew open with a loud bang.

Impelled then by she knew not what ungovernable impulse or terror, she leaped into the snow, which wetted her stockings to the knees, and, in this pitiful plight, plodded through the gate to the open office-door. There she saw a sight that would have gladdened the soul of a Rembrandt. A candle stood guttering its feeble life away upon the desk. Awe-stricken rustics cooled their backs against the dingy walls. In the centre of the room lay stiff and stark a female form, over which the Deadwick brewer bowed his head. Martha approached a step nearer, and saw the dead-white face and the abundant yellow hair of the woman she had so remorselessly hunted down. John turned, and saw her.

‘Ay, ’tis the missis!’ he said, slowly shaking his head; ‘she didna’ mean to come back to me; but God knew best what was good for her. His will be done!’

And an awful stillness followed these words.

At length John motioned to the villagers to withdraw. ‘In two minutes you may come back,’ he said; ‘I have a few, a very few words to say to this young lady, and

then you may come again. May heaven forgive her,' he added, turning to Martha, 'but here, i' the pocket o' her gown, is the money as she drewed out o' the Bank this morning. She didna' mean to come back to me again. Ah! Lyddy, Lyddy'—throwing himself upon the corpse — 'you've sinned agin me, an' you've vexed the good Lord above; an' I was a good husband to you; an' 'tis hard! —eh, 'tis indeed hard upo' me; but I forgive 'ee, Lyddy — I forgive 'ee!' and he kissed the cold, straight lips, and wept bitter tears.

Martha, reeling with a sudden giddiness, waited to hear no more. She had just time enough to stagger to the brewery gate and reach the cottage parlour, when her nerves yielded to the long tension, and she fainted away.

It came out at the inquest, on Monday morning, that, close beside the body of Mrs. Brophy, had been found the remains of a handsome man with a black moustache and imperial—a foreigner, beyond question or doubt—whose identity it was therefore impossible to establish. Accordingly, he figured among the 'unknown dead' in the published

list, and his body was consigned, for a time at least, to a nameless grave.

That evening, a large envelope, addressed to 'Martha Summerfield, care of Mr. Brophy, Deadwick, Stubbleshire,' was placed in John's hands. It being too late for the evening post, he forwarded it to Martha's Bayswater address on the following morning.

CHAPTER XIV.

OUT INTO THE WORLD AGAIN.

IT was not in Martha's nature to indulge in useless jeremiads over her fallen fortunes. Indeed, the utter collapse, like a house of cards, of all her schemes of retaliation, the disturbance of all her self-complacencies and prepossessions, the very obliquity of her mental vision, where it had been a question of the comparative integrity of her two lovers—all this outweighed with her the loss of a dozen fortunes. There was much bitterness, it is true, in the thought of parting with her beloved pictures and *bric-à-brac*; but since the sacrifice had to be made, she determined that not a single object in her collection should pass into the hands of the Summerfields, mother and son, if she could prevent it. Consequently, in answer to an early and urgent summons by telegraph, the dealer—a

friend of hers, whom she had consulted on the previous Friday—came to her Bayswater lodgings shortly before noon on Monday, and made a careful inventory of all her effects. He highly extolled the taste and discrimination she had displayed in their selection, and rather surprised the prodigal young minx by appraising their aggregate value at something above £3,000. Whereupon, after setting aside a few unimportant articles as souvenirs, she instructed him to dispose of the remainder, within a week if possible, otherwise to have them removed to Christie and Manson's and brought under the hammer; the proceeds in either case to be sent to Mr. Palmer, of Lincoln's Inn Fields.

When these instructions had been committed to writing, and a few necessary questions as to commission, etc., had been satisfactorily adjusted, the dealer took his departure, and Martha drove with all possible expedition to Mr. Palmer's office.

Mr. Soper, doing the honours of the establishment in his principal's absence, was certain the latter would return in a very few minutes; adding that the weather was very seasonable, and the usual railway accidents were setting in—in attestation of which he

produced the *Daily Telegraph*, and pointed out to Martha an appalling list of the dead and wounded in Saturday night's collision upon the Limeborough meadows.

'Don't,' she said, as Mrs. Brophy's ghastly face uprose in her mind, 'don't; put it away, and talk about something else, please.'

Mr. Soper calmly folded up the paper, and remarked :

'“Masks and Faces” is drawing well now at the Adelphi. Mr. Webster makes a very good Triplet, I think.'

'Oh !' she answered, and an awkward pause ensued.

'I *was* afraid,' he said at last, 'that you would catch cold in your eye ; but you do not appear to have done so. It was a very draughty keyhole though, wasn't it ?'

Martha looked at him a moment in surprise, and then smiled, for the first time in several days, as she recalled their visit to Highgate Hill.

'Mr. Soper,' she said, 'I owe you an apology. *You* were right and I was wrong in that affair ; I had altogether too good an opinion of myself and my cleverness.'

'That's nothing,' he answered ; 'I once had a bad attack of the same complaint my-

self. Everybody has it now and then. It's only really dangerous, though, in the chronic form. Ah! here is Mr. Palmer.' And Mr. Soper straightway bowed himself out of the office.

The lawyer's first words were in reference to the accident.

'I was in Deadwick when it occurred,' she said. 'Mrs. Brophy was killed, and her husband brought her body to the brewery. I saw it myself. It was terrible. He found the stolen money in her pocket. She was in the act of running away from him. Great heavens! what a retribution, Mr. Palmer!'

He was for a moment too astonished to speak.

'Why—why,' he said, at last, 'her name, I am sure, is not in the list of identified dead.'

'He removed the body from the wreck himself. Those in the published list were carried, I suppose, to Limeborough. He was very much excited over the discovery of the money. He will send it to Mrs. Summerfield at once, I think.'

'Then,' said Mr. Palmer, promptly, 'I will write by this afternoon's mail, and tell him not to do it.'

‘Why?’

‘Because it would be irregular,’ he answered. ‘I have not yet examined into all of those papers, in the first place; and then, I believe, it was your intention that this act of restitution, or whatever else you might call it, should be effected through me?’

‘Certainly.’

‘Well, business, you know, is business, my dear young friend.’

‘Yes, Mr. Palmer, and it is my purpose to leave it all to you. But how is the transfer of my property in America to be accomplished.’

‘You may give me a power of attorney, if you prefer.’

‘I do prefer, very much prefer. Have you prepared the form?’

‘Well, I thought, perhaps——’

‘Is it all ready for me to sign now?’

‘If you——’

‘Oh, I do, I do, Mr. Palmer; I want this thing finished at once and for all. And, indeed, I am in a very great hurry. I *must* be in Paris by to-morrow evening.’

‘Must?’ he repeated. ‘And why?’

‘Oh, don’t, don’t ask me, but I *must*; and I have a great deal to do yet this evening.

Will you not let me sign the paper at once, Mr. Palmer ?'

He leaned forward, took a document from his desk, opened it, and began to read, when she interrupted him :

'I am not in a condition to hear or understand a word of it,' she said, glancing nervously at the door ; for the thought had just occurred to her, that Charley might possibly call and find her there, in which case she thinks she should surely sink through the floor for shame. 'Let me sign it. In giving away one's property, technicalities can make but little difference to the giver.'

He handed her a pen in silence, and pointed to the bottom of the paper. She had written Martha, when she suddenly paused, and looked up with a sigh.

'Write,' he said, 'Martha Summerfield.'

The pen dropped from her fingers.

'Summerfield ?' she gasped.

'Yes,' he answered ; 'the property is registered in that name ; it cannot be transferred in any other.'

'Yes, I understand,' she said ; and finishing the signature, pushed the paper towards him. 'And now,' she continued, 'I want to tell you what I have done in regard to my pictures

and things ; they are worth, it appears, about £3,000."

'What!' exclaimed Mr. Palmer, with a look of blank astonishment. 'Three thousand pounds *sterling*?'

'It seems so, though I had no idea I had been so extravagant. But you see, a good Vibert—and I have several—costs a great deal of money, and then, the interest at seven per cent., on what I supposed was my property, had run up so while I was at school, that I had quite a large bank account to draw upon when I came to Europe. But, as I was about to tell you, sir, these things I prize dearly—oh, so dearly—and it's like tearing my heart out to part with them. But since they have *got* to go, I am determined that *Dexter* shall never have them. The money he is welcome to. Pah! every farthing of it; but his fingers shall never touch one of my treasures, if I can help it. I have instructed Mr.—his name and address are upon this card—to dispose of all my effects; and if he does not succeed in doing so within a week—I *may* give him ten days, for my rent is paid up to the 4th of January—he is then to send everything down to Christie and Manson's. I shall give him the key of my

rooms to-morrow. The proceeds of the sale are, of course, to be placed in your hands.'

Mr. Palmer made a note of all this.

'And now,' she added, rising, 'I must hurry off to the Bank, for it will close in half-an-hour. I am going to draw £800, and I will send you a signed cheque, which you can fill in for the balance, whatever it may be. Good-bye, Mr. Palmer.'

'Why—why—shall I not see you again?' he asked, in great astonishment.

'Not for a long time, I am afraid, Mr. Palmer.'

'But you have not given me your Paris address.'

'I do not know it yet myself. I can forward it to you from there. Good-bye;' and she extended her hand

'Stop, stop, one minute.'

'But the Bank, it will surely be closed.'

'Just one second, then. Have you seen our young friend?'

Her eyes fell.

'No.'

'Is it right to go away without doing so?'

'I cannot. I should die of shame. I cannot just yet; but I shall write to him before I go.'

‘Truly?’

‘Truly; and now, good-bye. You have been very kind to me, Mr. Palmer.’

‘Tut, tut! Good-bye, my dear child, and God bless you.’

‘Good-bye Mr. Soper,’ she said, as she passed through the outer office, and before that phlegmatic individual could get his attention from, ‘did grant demise and lease unto the said Paul Jones his exs ads and ass’s,’ Martha was half way across the square in a hansom.

By midnight everything was packed and in readiness for her departure. She had purchased her ticket and Katty’s in the afternoon. The tidal train was to leave Ludgate Hill Station at eight-ten in the morning. It only remained now for her to write to Charley. Four letters were thrown into the grate upon the score of saying too much or too little. Three more were made limp and streaked by her tears, and followed the others into the flames. The next was a more successful production, and was duly posted at seven o’clock the following morning.

The same evening Martha arrived in Paris, and engaged rooms at a little hotel near the St. Honoré market. About this very time,

the large envelope which had been sent to her Deadwick address, and forwarded thence by Mr. Brophy to Bayswater—arrived at its destination, and proved from its size, and the bulky nature of its contents, a source of great anxiety to the worthy landlady, who by some grievous oversight had omitted to take down Martha's Paris address.

CHAPTER XV.

DARK CLOUDS.

THANKS to poppy-head fomentations, mustard plasters, linseed poultices and a little gentle cupping, Charley felt that, take it all in all, he had had an awful Sunday of it. He was groaning to himself the next morning: 'I wish that old Colfax *would* come and see me,' when in walked the old boy himself.

'Hello! hello! This is the end of your fox-hunt, is it? Much good it is to give *you* the hypophosphites,' said the doctor, with mock severity, as he approached the bed side. 'Well, stick out your paw, young fellow, and let's see what is the matter with you; whew! that's a galloping pulse! Any chills? Just so—pain in your side, I suppose? Cough, of course, and thirsty as a fish all the time. Hum! what have they been doing for you here? What! sinapisms! cupping! Oh, the

devil! Do they think you have the pleurisy then?’

‘Yes, that is what they call it.’

‘Pleurisy be—pshaw! who’s your doctor?’

‘I don’t know his name; there he is—ask him,’ and Charley glanced toward the door.

Dr. Colfax turned quickly and saw a little nervous looking old gentleman bearing down upon him, hat and gloves in hand, whom he immediately drew into a corner of the room, and engaged in a conversation of five minutes’ duration. At the end of that time Charley was requested to bare his chest for examination, and the doctors applied their ears in turn to it. The result was another conference, in which he caught the words ‘red hepatization, vesicular murmurs and minute crepitation;’ and then he began to feel very ill, indeed.

‘By Jove, doctor,’ he said, a few minutes later, when the little old gentleman had taken his departure, ‘I didn’t think I was half as bad as that—what do you call it?’

‘Pneumonia, my good fellow, and its much more serious than pimples or tooth-ache, I can assure you. But you are under *my* care now. I have just discharged that nice old gentleman. You will need all your strength

before you are through with this, and he would have had you devoured by leeches, or eaten up by blisters, within a week. So be thankful, young man, that I chanced to be passing this way, and thought of you, this morning.'

'I am, doctor, very thankful,' said Charley.

'Ah, and so there *is* a little gratitude left in the world, after all! Very well; and now, who's your nurse?—that vast old lady with the milk-of-roses complexion, who let me in just now?'

'My landlady, yes; and she is very kind.'

'Hum! what's her name?'

'Mrs. Pippins.'

'Well, I'll just ring for Pippins,' said the doctor, pulling the bell rope, and then sitting down to write a prescription. 'Now, Mrs. Pippins,' he continued, as that individual came perspiring into the room a moment later, 'now, marm, this young gentleman here has been saying very sweet things about you, and I am not quite sure that I ought to trust you two together.'

'La! sir, what *do* you mean?' said Mrs. Pippins, mopping her face and sinking exhausted into the nearest chair.

'Only this, ma'am. Young gentlemen *will*

be young gentlemen, you know, and knowing the state of his feelings toward you, I give you a friendly warning—that's all.'

'Don't you mind him, Mrs. Pippins,' said Charley; 'he's my old doctor, and I told him how good and kind you were to me, and he is having his little joke about it—that is all.'

'The artful villain; why, sir, I shall expose you to Mrs. Pippins at once. Why, ma'am,' he added, facing round to the astonished landlady, 'do you know that he actually pursued one of your lovely sex to the bottom of a frozen river the other day?'

Mrs. Pippins reflected a moment, then her chair began to creak in an ominous manner, and the vast old lady quaked at last with compressed laughter.

'La, sir,' she said, 'a heap o' comfort it must ha' been to'm both. *I* wouldn't like to be coorted in ice-water, myself.'

'Hum, no; and the doctor went back at once to his prescription. 'Excuse me for changing the subject,' he added, a moment later, 'but my time is limited this morning, and—and you'll be good enough to send your servant to the chemist's with this prescription, and keep the room warm, please, and let him have all the cold water to drink

he wants, with a little beef-tea occasionally ; and just a single word with you in private, and then I'm off.'

Mrs. Pippins followed him to the end of the room, and her face visibly lengthened as, in a few earnest words, he explained the serious nature of the disease. Charley, perceiving this, and listening in vain for a clue to its meaning, turned with a sigh upon his pillow. The next moment Dr. Colfax was bending over him.

'Now, Mr. Yankee Doodle, you must keep yourself very quiet to-day,' he said, extending his hand. 'You are not strong enough yet, you know, to make love to Mrs. Pippins. If she even were to breathe on you now, you'd go down like a nine-pin, so be careful. Is there anything I can do for you?' he added, gently returning the pressure of Charley's hand.

'You are so kind to me, doctor, that I would not like to trouble you, but——'

'But what? if you don't tell me, I'll throw up the case at once, and send for that amiable old blood-letter again. Quick now! what is it?'

'Well, doctor, if you will write a line to Mr. Palmer, of 101, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and

tell him of my illness, I shall be very grateful.'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, doctor.'

'You are sure?'

'Indeed, yes.'

'Well, you Yankees *are* a queer people; I thought from that look you wanted to borrow two hundred pounds, at least. You are quite sure that is all?'

'Quite sure, doctor.'

But the old boy was not yet satisfied; he bent down and whispered something in Charley's ear which sent the blood into his white face at once.

'That's why I want to see him,' he whispered back; '*he'll* let her know, sure enough, never fear.'

'I'll do it. Good-bye, Charley.'

'God bless you, doctor; good-bye.'

The next morning Mr. Palmer called, and was imprudent enough to speak of Mrs. Brophy's death, of Martha's departure, and of the summary disposition she had resolved to make of her pictures and other effects. Charley listened attentively, but said little in return. *Pauvre diable!* what *could* he say?

Martha had gone away without even writing him a line, it would appear, so he merely faltered as Mr. Palmer rose to go :

‘Will you drop in to-morrow? you may have heard something from her by that time;’ which Mr. Palmer faithfully promised to do. Ten minutes afterward Dr. Colfax arrived, and he, mounting the stairs, heard the postman’s knock at the door. He was feeling Charley’s pulse when Mrs. Pippins entered the room with a letter in her hand. He sprang forward and intercepted her.

‘What’s this? what’s this?’ he said, seizing upon the letter and examining the superscription carefully. ‘By Jove!’ he added to himself, ‘it’s from that young Yankee minx, and it may do him more good than any formula in the British Pharmacopœia; but on the other hand——Hang it! if I only knew what it contained. Here, young man,’ he said aloud, ‘I have a letter for you; but as I have forbidden any reading, I cannot permit you to see it. If you will trust me to read it to you, well and good; if not——’

‘Oh! yes, yes! Open it quick, doctor, I know the envelope. It’s from Marty, doctor. Read it! yes, yes.’

Charley had started up into a sitting posture.

His wan face was now in a blaze of excitement.

‘Mr. Smythe!’ said the doctor, sternly, ‘lie down, or this epistle goes into the grate.’

Charley’s head went back upon the pillow quicker than you could say Jack Robinson. His wistful look as the doctor opened the letter and glanced over its contents was too much for the man of medicine.

‘Confound it! there! take it. *That* can’t hurt your eyes,’ said he, thrusting it into Charley’s hands, and immediately running to the window to ascertain the state of the weather—a difficult subject of investigation, it would appear, such an unconscionably long time was he about it.

This is what Martha wrote :

‘DEAR CHARLEY,

‘I know all about it now, and you are the best and noblest fellow, and I am the *meanest* and most *selfish* girl in the whole world. How can I ever look you in the face again? And as for you, you will certainly never care to set your eyes upon me again as long as I live. Oh dear! it makes me feel so utterly miserable and wretched, to know

that I have brought you *nothing* but trouble. It would have been ever so much better if you had just walked away that afternoon and let me drown quietly by myself. It would have been quickly over, and then, Charley, you would have *always* thought kindly of me, I am sure. I had teased you, I know, and had been spiteful and cross and impudent, it may be, for that is just like me; but I had never done you a wrong—a *real* wrong, in all my life, and you would have probably said: “Poor girl! she was foolish, and self-conceited, and proud, and stubborn, and ever so much more that is downright objectionable; but then, her heart was all right, after all, and if she had lived to have had the conceit knocked out of her, as we most of us do, she would have made a very tolerable woman, as women go, after all.” But now, Charley, you simply *despise* me, I know—and that reflection is a thousand times more bitter to me than the loss of all my fortune. I am going away from London to-morrow, and intend, by working night and day, to try and crush some of the folly out of me. It will be hard work, for I am full of it, but in the end I trust I shall meet with a fair measure of success. Assured of your forgiveness, however, I *know*

that I could gain a complete victory over myself. However, *verbum sap.*——' Charley looked up and said :

' Doctor !'

' Well ?'

' What does *verbum sap.* mean ?'

' It means,' said the doctor, ' that a young fellow who can't take a hint is a fool.'

' Oh, I see!' and Charley, much elated, went on with his letter :

' As for that poor Mr. Brophy (you have heard of the accident, *of course*), my heart really aches for him, Charley. I was there when it happened—when the wretched woman was brought stiff and cold into the brewery, with all the stolen money in her pocket. It was simply awful. But, to make matters worse, Mr. Brophy put all the blame of it upon *my* shoulders. Said he, " If you had not taken the cottage, this trouble would never have occurred," which I suppose is quite true ; but then, had it not been for Dexter's perfidy (I could MURDER that man, Charley), I should never have passed a night in his house, and consequently never have discovered what was in the black box ; so that it seems a little hard upon me, after all.

However, if I were sure of *your* forgiveness, I should care but little for my other troubles. My remorse for wronging you is very, very great ; and I shall never be happy until you *do* forgive me.

‘ Repentantly yours,

‘ MARTY.’

Charley’s joy was in a measure damped by the discovery that the letter made no suggestion as to the means of assuring her of his entire forgiveness. Had it contained an address, he would doubtless have insisted upon forwarding a full absolution by telegram to Paris at once.

‘ Time enough for that,’ said the doctor, ‘ when you are upon your legs again. So let us to business, as I am obliged to run down to Limeborough this afternoon, and shall need all my time.’

Half an hour later, he took his departure ; and Charley, owing either to the excitement attendant upon the reception of Martha’s letter or the natural course of the disease, grew steadily worse as the day wore on, and was more or less delirious during the night.

Mr. Palmer was his first visitor in the

morning. Charley's cough, by this time, was something dreadful to hear.

'Dear me—dear me!' said the lawyer, 'what a terrible cough!'

'Yes,' said Charley, gasping for breath; 'has she sent you her address yet, Mr. Palmer?'

'Well, no; not yet. Hardly time yet, you know.'

'Yes; I suppose that *must* be it,' and Charley sighed. There was an awkward pause. Then he raised himself up, with an effort, upon his elbow, and took Martha's letter from beneath the pillow.

'Just read that,' he said. '*She's* all right, you see. I told you that she'd feel very sorry about it;' and his head fell heavily back upon the pillow.

'You'll see,' he added, a moment later, with a feeble smile, 'you'll see, when you turn over the page, what she says about Dexter; and Marty could just do it, too; she could just lay *him* out. Why, Mr. Palmer, he hasn't got the pluck of a chippy-bird—Dexter hasn't.'

'Well, I don't know what a chippy-bird is,' said the lawyer; 'but I know a good letter when I see it—and *that* is one,' re-

turning it, 'a very, very good letter indeed!'

There was another pause, and then Charley asked :

'Has she any money, do you think, Mr. Palmer?'

'Oh yes, certainly.'

'Much?'

'Well, as to that—sufficient, I should say, for all present urgencies.'

'You are sure?'

'Quite sure.'

Another pause occurred, and then Charley spoke again :

'I've been thinking,' he said, 'that it's very rough on Marty to lose all her pictures and things. She'll miss them very much, I dare say?'

'I am sure of it,' said Mr. Palmer.

'If there was any way of saving them for her,' Charley went on, 'it might be just as well to do it, I suppose. Are they—er—pretty valuable, do you suppose?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Mr. Palmer, laughing ; 'three thousand pounds will purchase the entire lot.'

Charley's blue eyes opened very wide at this.

‘Three—how many pounds?’ he demanded.

‘Three thousand.’

By this time all Charley’s teeth were visible.

‘Well,’ he said, ‘she *is* an extravagant young monkey, and no mistake.’ Then, fearing this might be construed into something derogatory to Martha, he quickly added, ‘I’ll bet they are *good* pictures, anyhow. She wouldn’t have any other; and she’s quite right, too. Have the best you can get, *I* say, and that’s why I want *her*; but I don’t exactly see how this is going to be managed. She thinks they are gone for good, I suppose?’

‘Oh, yes! and she nearly cried when she told me about it.’

‘Did she, poor girl!—it *would* be a surprise for her, wouldn’t it, if she found them all there in her rooms when she returned to London? Let me see, to-morrow is Christmas, isn’t it?—so it couldn’t exactly be a Christmas present, you know; there isn’t time enough for that. But how would it answer for a New Year’s gift, that is, of course, if it can be managed?’

‘Do you really mean that you intend purchasing these things?’ asked the lawyer in great astonishment.

‘Well, I don’t know,’ said Charley, ‘if you think a cheque for a thousand pounds, paid down, would secure the lot, I’ll do it, of course ; the rest of the money, you know, can be had from America in a month’s time. You could write an order on the Trenton Bank to sell some of my bonds, and I’ll sign it, don’t you see? What do you think about it, Mr. Palmer?’

‘Oh, I have no doubt as to my ability to effect such an arrangement, providing the pictures have not already been sold.’

Charley’s jaw fell.

‘It is very rude in me, I know,’ he said, ‘and I enjoy your company *very* much, but *would* you mind attending to the matter for me at once. If this disease *should* chance to get the best of me, I could go out of the world with a lighter heart, if I knew that Marty had a little something like that always near her to keep my memory green in her heart.’

The result of all this was that, when Mr. Palmer reached his office a few minutes later, he sent his junior clerk with a note to the picture-dealer, requesting the latter to take no further steps towards the sale of Miss Summerfield’s effects, and to forward without delay

his bill for unearned commissions to 101, Lincoln's Inn Fields, together with the key of Miss Summerfield's apartments.

When Dr. Colfax arrived at Charley's lodgings, he shook his head gravely at that young gentleman's appearance. He held a long and secret consultation with Mrs. Pippins, wrote out a fresh prescription, busied himself with the preparation of a turpentine stupe, which he applied to Charley's chest, and then he took a chair by the bedside.

'Umph!' he said, 'that little Yankee girl ought to be here; one squeeze of her hand would be worth four Colfaxes and a hundred prescriptions to you. What the devil possesses her to stay away so, I can't conceive. I should have thought the last affair with that miauling pussy-cat of a Dexter would have brought her here flying.'

'But, doctor,' interposed Charley feebly, '*she* doesn't know that I am sick. She's ashamed, too, to see me; don't you understand? It's my place to go after her; and I would if I could. If she only *did* know that I was sick—Oh, dear me, that's just it!—she'd come quick enough then. I know the little girl well enough for that.'

'I believe it—I believe it!' said the doctor

warmly. 'She's a bit of a flash in the pan, sky-rockety sort—eh, my boy? but the heart is all right, never fear. Jove! I wonder if she has heard how you put the catechism to the parson! "Can you swim?" said you. "No," said he, spitting out bits of ice and sniffing like a sea-lion. "Did you save the young lady's life—yes, or no?" "No," said he, with his pious jaws clattering away like a sewing-machine; and then, by the scruff of the neck, you dragged him out and handed him over for dissection to the Tartar. By the way, this piece of news will do you good. Thereverend gentleman's parishioners, headed by the bereaved Mr. Brophy, have risen in arms against him. He preached on Sunday to a congregation consisting of the beadle, the beadle's dog, and a deaf-and-dumb old lady, who has gone to church for the last sixty years as it were by clock-work, and *couldn't* be made to understand. Moreover, the bishop is coming down this week; and, if what a certain superfluous rural dean tells me is true, I wouldn't be surprised if Mr. Dexter took a short swim out of his present incumbency within a month. And here's another thing. I never knew Miss Lottie—by the way, she's coming up to see you in a day or

two—I never knew she had a *temper* until yesterday. I simply said “Dexter” to her as one might say “boo” to a goose, when spit, spit went her feline ladyship, before I could get on my glasses to survey the phenomenon. ‘Gad, how her eyes blazed! “*Don’t mention the beast to me!*” she said. “Never again, upon my honour,” I answered; “for what little capillary adornment Time, in his unscrupulous ravages, has spared me, I at present stand sorely in need of, if you please, Miss Cadmus.” Poor old Brophy, though—that’s a sad affair, and everybody feels very sorry for him. It seems a little strange, of course, that his wife should have been upon that train; but John explains it by saying that they had been up to town together, and somehow had got separated. So he thinks, not knowing much about London, she must have got by mistake upon the through express, which does not stop at Limeborough.’

Charley said nothing; but it occurred to him that poor old John must have thought a great deal of his ‘missis,’ after all.

He was too ill the following day to lament over the absence of Christmas festivities, or to envy the omnivorous multitude to whom

goose and plum-pudding would be a Christmas burden and nightmare before the rising of Thursday's sun. That sun, however, brought Lottie Cadmus, who proved to be kind and tender as a sweetheart, and even so far forgot her recent jealousies as to whisper hopeful and soothing things into his ear about Martha. In Martha's *absence*, however, nothing concerning her could be permanently soothing. Grave prophecies of coming rain both fascinate and madden the owner of parched and thirst-sore lips. Every morning, as the days went by and he grew worse and worse, he demanded of Mr. Palmer :

‘For heaven’s sake ! has she not written yet ?’

To which Mr. Palmer invariably rejoined :

‘Not yet ; but I shall surely hear from her soon.’

‘Mrs. Pippins,’ Charley then would ask, ‘dear, kind Mrs. Pippins, are you *quite* sure there is no letter for me ?’

To which Mrs. Pippins would chirp something in a terribly palpable moral falsetto about the gales and belated steamers and irregular mails, though there hadn’t been wind enough abroad during the week to blow ‘God save the Queen’ out of an harmonium.

Dr. Colfax got tired of this at last. Said he to Palmer, one morning:

‘Look here, this is killing the boy; he won’t live five days longer at this rate; the minx must be found. *Somebody* must go to Paris and unearth the provoking creature—who will do it?’

‘You anticipate me by thirty seconds,’ said Palmer; ‘I was just going to speak of the same thing. Sit down and write her a letter with plenty of Anglo-Saxon in it, and give it to me. I have already written one that will surprise her very much—there is a third which I know nothing about, an immense epistle which has been sent to me from her lodgings in Bayswater. The three I shall forward to a friend of mine in Paris; he is the original “Devil on Two Sticks,” a fellow with four brains and several hundred eyes; he will find her and deliver the letters within half an hour after their arrival, I’d be willing to take my oath upon it. Come, doctor, sit down and write.’

The three letters were duly forwarded by that evening’s mail.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WIND IN THE RIGHT QUARTER AT LAST.

THE following day Martha was at work in an out-of-the-way corner of the Luxembourg, and was so absorbed in her labour that she did not hear the footsteps or perceive the presence of a young gentleman who, for some minutes, had been hovering about her. At last he touched her arm, and she sprang up in dismay.

‘You are Miss Summerfield, I believe?’ he said, in almost perfect English.

She looked into his imperturbable face a moment before replying. ‘He resembles Mr. Palmer somewhat,’ she thought; ‘but I am certain I have never seen him before. What *can* he want with me?’

‘No, monsieur, I am not,’ she answered at last.

‘Ah well, it is all the same. Miss Summer-

field failed to send her address to Mr. Palmer of Lincoln's Inn Fields, so he has commissioned me to place these letters—which are of the greatest importance, I believe—in her hands. Knowing that she was an artist, I thought it possible I might find her here. But,' he added, extending the letters with a smile, 'as I said before, it is all the same. You will give them to her, and relieve me of any further anxiety upon the subject, I am sure.'

'But, monsieur——' she commenced.

'Thank you very much, mademoiselle. Good afternoon;' and before Martha could recover from her astonishment, she found herself once more in the gallery.

'Well, upon my word,' she said, 'that man fairly out-Sopers Soper. He was as certain of my identity as though he had always known me. And the coolness of him, too! Well! if there are not strange people in *this* world!—and now for these letters.'

Mr. Palmer's was the only one with whose superscription she was familiar, so she broke that open first: he wrote as follows:

'MY DEAR MISS SUMMERFIELD' ('Why,' she thought, '*will* he persist in the use of

that name.'). 'I very much regret the necessity of being cross with you; but when will you cease to do foolish things?' ('Oh dear me!' sighed Martha.) 'Here is this poor young fellow, who has done so much for you, now at death's door, and raving for you day and night' (here her heart gave a great jump, and the letter trembled in her hand); 'and yet you not only hide from him and all the rest of your friends, but you persist in withholding your *address* from us all. Think of the consequences of this! Were the worst to happen, we could not even notify you of the poor boy's funeral.' ('Oh! oh! oh!' and Martha dropped the letter and began to cry. This lasted for some time, then she picked it up again and went on.) 'Moreover, important interests of your own require your immediate presence in London. I have just received an extraordinary letter from your father's New York solicitor, from which it appears that you were not only formally adopted as his child by Mr. Summerfield, but that, on the day preceding his disappearance, he signed a will leaving his entire fortune, subject only to an annual charge of 3000 dollars to be paid to your mother, to his beloved (adopted) daughter, Martha Dessart Summer-

field. That document has never been found, and the inference of course is, that it was upon your father's person at the time of his death. There being at the time no question raised as to the legality of your succession to the property, the solicitor refrained from any mention of the will. The discovery of your father's remains, however, opens up the whole question anew. There can be no doubt that both the draft and the will were stolen, and a strong probability, therefore, exists, that the latter may yet be found. Hence the desirability of your immediate presence here. We have some reasons for fearing that M. Mivart, in attempting to escape with his sister, perished with her in that terrible accident ; but though no such document was found upon any of the unclaimed bodies, my hope of recovering it is in no wise impaired thereby. I have given Mrs. Summerfield a formal notification of my intention to dispute, for the present, her son's claim to your estate. I only regret your precipitate action in reference to *your pictures*. They were sold several days since in one lot to a foreign gentleman, who has also taken your rooms at Bayswater.

'I confide this letter to a lynx-eyed relative of mine, who will be sure to ferret you out.

Regretting the necessity for adopting such an unusual medium of communication, and again urging you for your own and that poor fellow's sake to return with all possible despatch to London, I remain,

‘Your devoted servant,
‘HENRY PALMER.’

Martha looked at her watch. She could return by way of Dieppe and Newhaven that evening, in which case five hours for preparation were still before her. Her brain was in a tumult, her heart was thumping madly in her bosom.

‘Dear Lord,’ she whispered, closing her eyes reverently, ‘now that I can go to him, spare him, oh, spare him, until I come.’

Then she bethought herself of the remaining letters, and she broke the seal of the largest. Then something like a scream escaped her, and her breath stood still as she pulled forth from the envelope a legal document, marked in red ink as ‘*The last will and testament of Charles Summerfield, Esq.*’

Upon a blank space below there was written in pencil :

‘MY DEAR CHILD,

‘I have very little claim to call you

that, but M. Smythe, he assures me you know it, so it makes no difference. He is a fine fellow, this Smythe, and I am glad to know that he loves you—you must marry him, and for a little *dot* I send you what I find in a dead man's pocket. If I did not find it then it was lost, and I have done you some service, after all; for M. Smythe, he has told me they take all your money away, and I could not endure to hear of it. You must thank him for it. He has come to avert me of danger, and gives me a £50 note to leave the country, and says it is all for his love for Marthe. Mrs. Brophy, I lied about that, she is *not* my sister, and I detest her, but she comes in my room at this minute and brings all the money from the Bank (you do not mind, I am sure you have plenty yet), and she says, Will we go to America altogether? Well, I do not like to go with a poosy cat like that, but the money it tempts me, and I say yes. Adieu, then, my child; marry M. Smythe, and forgive me if you ever can.

‘AUGUSTE MIVART.’

Was she really taking leave of her senses? Drops of perspiration stood upon her forehead, tears streamed from her eyes, a smile

was upon her lips, dumb terror was in her heart, grief, gladness, hope, despair, fear, thankfulness, struggled to be uttermost in her thoughts, and the result was a mental Bedlam. A lover dying, an abandoned name restored, a parent hurled swiftly with his load of sin into the blackest of eternities, a fortune dropping like Danae's gold from the skies, all this to be realized and comprehended in a moment. It were enough to drive any woman mad. And here was another letter yet to be opened. Some fresh joy or sorrow yet to be revealed. 'Well,' she thought, wiping the perspiration from her brow. 'It can't be anything more astounding than what I have just read. So here goes.' It was from Dr. Colfax, said he:

'MISS RUNAWAY,

'I have a young cub here under my charge, who does nothing but howl day and night for "Marty," and my own private conviction is that if "Marty" doesn't very soon put in an appearance and stop his infernal row, the undertaker and a select company of mutes in the next street will have him in spite of all my leeches, fly-blisters, boluses, cataplasms and things. *Verb. sap.* You know

what that means, which is more than the young cub did. Come straight here to 490, Great Russell Street.

‘Your servant,

‘P. COLFAX.’

‘Oh, mercy! mercy! what the poor boy must suffer,’ cried Martha, quickly gathering up her brushes and materials.

A few minutes later she was dashing down the Rue de Seine, toward the Pont des Arts, in a fiacre. At half-past seven she arrived with Katty and a select assortment of boxes at the St. Lazare Station.

CHAPTER XVII.

IN WHICH THE CURTAIN FALLS.

CHARLEY was delirious all that night. Just after daybreak his mind cleared, but he was in such a state of physical exhaustion that Dr. Colfax, upon his arrival, experienced for the first time a downright feeling of alarm.

‘She hasn’t come yet, of course,’ he whispered to Mrs. Pippins, and as the landlady shook her head, the irascible old gentleman gave vent to a prolonged growl, which was the reverse of complimentary to young girls in general, and Martha Summerfield in particular. As he was going away, he said, ‘Sit by him as much as you can; I will return in the course of a few hours. If she *should* come, make her take off her things and stay.’

Towards the middle of the afternoon Charley fell asleep. Mrs. Pippins, as she sat watching him, dropped into a deeply medita-

tive mood, from which she was aroused at last by the sound of a foot-fall, and looking up, she saw a young lady in the room. Raising her fingers at once to her lips, she pointed to the bed and whispered :

‘ We’ve been expecting of you a long time, miss ; he’ll be better now.’

Martha removed her hat and cloak, and stepped to the bed-side. Her first feeling was one of acute distress ; her mouth quivered, and smarting tears rushed unbidden to her eyes as she noted the changes in the gaunt and haggard face upon the pillow. The golden curls were in a sad tangle now ; a yellow stubble of beard grew rank upon the once comely features ; the waxen eyelids drooped heavily ; the lips were pinched and blue ; and but for his stertorous breathing, she might have imagined him a corpse.

‘ Marty, Marty !’ he suddenly cried out in his sleep.

The cords of her throat tightened, her temples throbbed with pain ; she felt that she was choking—she could not stand this any longer. Powerless to resist the impulse, she stooped and kissed him upon the forehead. He opened his eyes with a start ; then a look of ineffable joy spread over his features.

‘Marty!’ he whispered.

‘My poor darling!’ and burying her face beside his in the pillow, she threw her arms about him, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

This proving contagious, Mrs. Pippins exploded with loud grief, so that Dr. Colfax, reappearing at that moment, felt it necessary to say: ‘For the Lord’s sake, Mrs. Pippins, what is the matter with *you*?’ Then he glanced across the room, and witnessed something that made his kind old heart fairly turn a somersault in his bosom.

‘Hello, hello! here you are at last—eh, my good lass,’ he cried; ‘and now, of course, *my* occupation’s gone!’

‘And a good job too,’ said Martha, smiling through her tears; ‘it is high time a stop was put to your leeches and fly-blisters and cata-somethings. Has he really been giving you those dreadful things, Charley?’

‘Haw, haw! that touched you, did it? I had a mind to say that one of his eyes had been taken out on a plate, his windpipe cut open, and one of his legs amputated; but I detest exaggeration, you see.’

‘And draw the line at fly-blisters? Yes, I understand,’ said Martha.

Whereupon Charley ventured to say, in a very feeble voice, and with a subdued twinkle in his eye, that the doctor *had* turpented him pretty well, and no mistake; but that he was the kindest old boy in the whole broad universe. Whereupon, the volatile Martha lapsed into tears again, and squeezing the doctor's hand, said that she knew it, and that she had a great, *great* notion to kiss him for it too. Then Pippins came in for a share of eulogy, and would have been promptly embraced, had not her prodigious girth made her practicably unembraceable.

After all this, and much more to the same effect, it was arranged between them that two rooms should be set apart for the use of Katty and her mistress, and that Martha should henceforth be Charley's nurse.

When Mr. Palmer came that evening, he was glad, from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot—otherwise, he was glad through and through to see Marty, with her air of mingled dignity and concern, moving about among the medicine bottles, while Charley's blue eyes followed her every step she took, as though his life depended upon her never leaving him again. But when she produced and handed over the will to him for safe

keeping and such legal action as he thought proper, the man of the law confessed that 'the breath was knocked right out of him. It was,' he went on to say, '*the most* extraordinary coincidence—'

'All Charley's doings, though,' she wanted it to be distinctly understood.

'Yes, I know, of course; the *most* extraordinary coincidence, I was about to say, I *ever* heard of in my life.'

'By-the-bye,' said Martha, 'I am greatly indebted to that sharp-witted young gentleman who acted as your messenger yesterday. Who is he, Mr. Palmer?'

An unwonted tinge of red appeared in the lawyer's face.

'Ah!' he answered; 'yes, well—we all have our little secrets, Miss Summerfield; but, as you say, he is a very clever young fellow indeed.'

And the conversation drifted into a different channel.

The next day, when they were alone, Charley said to Martha:

'Marty, do you see that little box over there, on the table?'

'Yes, Charley.'

'I wish you would bring it here.'

She obeyed.

‘The key,’ he said, ‘is under the vase on the mantelpiece.’

She found it, and brought it to him.

‘Now open it,’ he said.

She did so ; and there was exposed to the light merely a roll of white paper.

‘It’s inside,’ he said ; ‘undo the package, Marty.’

Again she obeyed ; and having removed five or six layers of paper, she came to a wretched little piece of stained blue ribbon.

‘That came off while you were in the water, Marty ; it twined right about my neck. I found it there when I changed my clothes. I wouldn’t take twenty thousand pounds for it, Marty.’

She was too much affected for the moment to speak. He profited by the pause. Said he, gently putting his hand on hers :

‘We shall be married, Marty—shan’t we—if I get well ?’

‘If you wish it, darling—yes !’

Then she laid her face close beside his on the pillow, and there was a long, long silence in the room.

Charley was the first to speak. Said he :

‘I would have given you a Christmas present, Marty, if I’d been well, you know.’

‘You *have* given me one, Charley.’

‘Why, what is that?’

‘One of the dearest and best boys in the whole world for a husband.’

‘Oh!’ and there was another long interval of silence. At last, Charley spoke again: ‘Well,’ he said, ‘I mean to give you some little thing for your New Year’s—— Any way——’

The entrance of the doctor at this point prevented him, however, from entering into the particulars of the proposed gift.

Charley now began to make rapid strides toward recovery. Martha rarely quitted his bedside. Mrs. Pippins shed no more tears. The doctor was in ecstasies. One day Mr. Palmer brought with him a characteristic letter from Mrs. Summerfield, in which she abandoned, in Dexter’s name and her own, all claim to the residue of the Summerfield estate: ‘I have no longer any feeling in the matter,’ she wrote; ‘I merely asserted such rights as I thought I legitimately possessed. These rights having been disproved, however, I withdraw from all controversy in the matter. My own fortune is ample. Your

client may rest in undisturbed possession of what now appears to be legally her own.'

Upon another occasion Mr. Cadmus called, and was very kind to them both. Upon a hint from the doctor, instantly confirmed by the blushes of the guilty pair, he said, as he rose to go :

'Well, I suppose, after the wedding, I must introduce my new niece to all the Limeborough people. We must have the breakfast at The Elms, as a matter of course. Dexter will not be there to annoy you this time, either, Charley. He has definitively abandoned us. I believe Stubbleshire air did not agree with him. The Deadwick living is in the market again.'

A few days later, when Charley was able to walk about the chamber with the aid of Marty's arm, she said to him.

'Charley, do you know anything about the foreigner who bought my pictures?'

'What a question!' said he; 'why?'

'Well,' she returned, 'I tried to buy them back, but it seems he won't sell them again at any price.'

'He must think a lot of them,' suggested Charley.

'Oh, that goes without saying. It was a

terrible trial for me to part with them, I can tell you. And I was thinking that in case he were an obliging sort of man, I should like to run up to Bayswater some day, and take one more look at them.'

'I'll tell you what to do,' said Charley; 'wait until I am able to go out. I should like to see them myself. It will be my last chance, of course.'

She warmly acquiesced in the suggestion, and so it befell that one sunny afternoon, shortly afterward, a cab containing Martha, Charley and Mr. Palmer drove up to No. 5, Sebastopol Terrace, Bayswater. Martha saw with surprise and pleasure, as she entered the rooms, that no change had been made in the arrangement of her pictures and ornaments.

'He found he couldn't improve upon it,' was her complacent reflection.

A bright fire burned upon the grate, a bouquet of hot-house flowers was upon the table, and a canary, remarkably like the pet one she had given to the landlady upon her departure, chirruped from behind the window curtains. There was nothing very singular about all this, but when Katty, with every tooth in her head visible, came in to lay the

cloth for dinner, and the landlady, following her, dropped a courtesy and said :

‘Welcome home again, Miss Summerfield !—’

Martha turned sharply round to Mr. Palmer and said :

‘Where, then, is this foreign gentleman you told me about ?’

‘There he stands ;’ and the lawyer pointed to Charley, who by this time was red to the very roots of his hair.

She understood it all in a moment.

‘You good-for-nothing thoughtful darling,’ she cried, and Charley was straightway seized upon and nearly strangled in the embrace of a pair of shapely arms.

‘Well,’ he gasped, ‘I thought as we were to be married so soon—Mr. Palmer there has the license in his pocket—you might as well have a peep at your wedding present.’

‘And the dear old boy,’ she whispered, upon his shoulder, ‘really, *really* bought back all my treasures for me ?’

‘Well, you see,’ he answered, ‘I couldn’t bear to have you lose them, Marty.’

‘You darling ! oh, you darling !’ and he was cut short by another hug.

Whereupon Katty set up a dreadful howl

of joy. The landlady, suffering from pent-up emotion, hurried out of the room with her apron to her eyes. Mr. Palmer felt that there was not a bit of cynicism left in his body, but a good deal of tenseness about his eye-lids. He was determined to exhibit no visible sign of weakness, at all events ; but he broke completely down when Martha, making a sudden spring at him, actually kissed the amiable old hypocrite.

There was a very general feeling of curiosity among Limeborough folk to witness a certain marriage at St. John's. It was universally conceded, too, that a better-looking couple had seldom received the rector's nuptial blessing.

Though Mr. Palmer acquitted himself well at the wedding breakfast, it was felt that Dr. Colfax's speech, characterised by Sir John Pericardium as 'excaintric, vairy,' was the crowning feature of that interesting occasion.

Charley thrust Mivart's confession into the fire. He thought to himself, 'It won't do for such a document as that to be lying around loose in Mrs. Smythe's house.'

Lottie Cadmus is Lady Ferrum now. You must know her husband by reputation. He

built that great unpronounceable Russian railway you have heard so much about. He represents a leading coal and iron borough in the House. There are not many better dinners given in Park Lane than his, over which Lottie presides with infinite tact and grace.

John Brophy erected an expensive tombstone above the remains of the peccant Lydia, and then he married a very excellent country girl, who could read a little coarse print, and *had* heard of Cicero, though whether he belonged to the planetary system, or was simply a foreign country, it would have puzzled her to decide. She proved, however, to be an admirable housekeeper, a faithful wife, and —what was very much more to the purpose in John's opinion—an affectionate and devoted *mother*.

THE END.

